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# Methodism and Moral Character: The Function of Methodist Satire in Henry Fielding's Novels

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Caitlin Lee Kelly entitled "Methodism and Moral Character: The Function of Methodist Satire in Henry Fielding's Novels." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

Misty G. Anderson, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

John P. Zomchick, Jenn Fishman

Accepted for the Council:
Dixie L. Thompson

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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# METHODISM AND MORAL CHARACTER: THE FUNCTION OF METHODIST SATIRE IN HENRY FIELDING'S NOVELS

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Caitlin Lee Kelly
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# Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my grandmother, Una Lee Shelton, who, by earning a master's degree while teaching public school full-time, gives me the privilege to represent the third generation of women in my family to receive a graduate degree.

## Abstract

This thesis explores Henry Fielding's satiric representations of Methodism and Methodists in his novels *Shamela*, *Joseph Andrews*, *Tom Jones*, and *Amelia*. By examining these Methodist representations and by using them to chart a progression across Fielding's career as a novelist, Methodism emerges as a point of intersection with his larger concern about the effects of moral character on the stability of society. Fielding reveals the problem surrounding moral character through the villainy of hypocrites, which requires a shrewd observer to overcome. In an effort to provide a solution to this problem, Fielding asserts in "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men" (1743) that by judging the actions of others firsthand, individuals can expose hypocrisy and avert its dangers.

Fielding's satiric representations of Methodism indicate that it compromises the ability of actions to serve as indicators of moral character through its doctrine of assurance, which privileges faith over good works (actions). For Fielding, Methodism undermines the system he describes in the "Essay," leaving people to encounter one another with suspicion. As Fielding's representations of Methodism become more nuanced over time, they reveal an alteration in his understanding of the ability to judge moral character and of the meaning of character as a concept. In the end, however, Fielding concedes that there can be no accurate, systematized method of interpreting moral character when he conflates Methodist representations with other images of hypocrisy. His depiction of Methodism then is not just another reaction to the outward representation of Methodists (as per the satiric tradition), but rather a sophisticated use of Methodism's main problem—the malleability of character for which it seems to allow—that complicates Fielding's own obsession with finding a system by which to expose hypocrites.

# Table of Contents

**Introduction**
Methodism and Character: Fielding's "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men" and the Novels 1

**Chapter 1**
Representing Character in *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews*: From Satiric Burlesque to Satiric Discourse 21

**Chapter 2**
*Tom Jones*: Faith, Good Works, and Interpreting Moral Character 47

**Chapter 3**
Methodism and the Complication of Character in *Amelia* 70

**Works Cited** 93

**Vita** 97

# Introduction

## Methodism and Character: Fielding's "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men" and the Novels

"I have often thought it a melancholy Instance of the great Depravity of Human Nature, that whilst so many Men have employed their utmost Abilities to invent Systems, by which the artful and cunning Part of Mankind may be enabled to impose on the rest of the World; few or none should have stood up the Champions of the innocent and undesigning, and have endeavoured to arm them against Imposition." *Henry Fielding, An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men (1743)*

When Methodism, led by John Wesley and George Whitefield, began to emerge in England in the middle of the eighteenth-century as a popular evangelical sect within the Anglican Church, the skepticism and outright opposition of orthodox Anglicans surfaced in multitudes of pamphlets, cartoons, poems, plays, and other short works satirizing the movement's practices and their appearance.[1] While representations of Methodism in the texts of the dramatist, essayist, and novelist Henry Fielding could be read as just another example of these superficial satires, his uses of Methodism are actually substantial and sophisticated revisions of them. Additionally, his satiric representations of Methodism not only critique the doctrine and practices of the Methodist movement, but also simultaneously critique the inability of the British to judge interior moral character accurately. In "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men" (1743), Fielding examines the dangers hypocrisy poses and the ways through which hypocrites might be recognized, ultimately concluding that the most effective way to protect oneself from hypocrites is by interpreting moral character on the basis of their actions and behaviors. Consequently, in order to approach this larger problem of interpretation through

[1] In the most comprehensive study of eighteenth-century satiric responses to Methodism, *Methodism Mocked: The Satiric Reaction to Methodism in the Eighteenth Century*, Albert Lyles compiles a lengthy bibliography of such satires. Among the more prominent and accessible are Samuel Foote's play *The Minor*, an anonymous satiric poem entitled "Fanatical Conversion; or, Methodism Displayed," and John Kirkby's essay, "The Imposter Detected; or, The Counterfeit Saint Turn'd Inside Out."

representations of Methodism, Fielding focuses on the place where Methodism intersects with the solution he proposes in the "Essay": the doctrine of assurance.

Essentially then, Fielding exploits what he and other orthodox Anglicans saw as Methodism's shortcomings as a way to approach his primary concern: exposing hypocrisy and explicating its dangers to an increasingly modern and urban society. Throughout the novels, Fielding consistently satirizes the doctrine of assurance which Wesley explicates in his sermon *Free Grace*. The doctrine of assurance taught that in order to receive God's grace, one only needed to have faith, and that an individual could know that they had received God's grace through a moment of assurance, oftentimes described as "a warming of the heart" (*Free Grace* 13). Since the doctrine of assurance states that only faith is required for grace, good works, which were highly valued by orthodox Anglicans, and even more so by the Latitudinarian Anglicans who sought to reform Anglican practice, appeared to be of little importance to the Methodists. Fielding deeply valued good works, not only because good works satisfy what he sees as the Christian responsibility to act charitably, but also because they are an integral part of the system of interpreting moral character that he sets forth in the "Essay."

Through the doctrine of assurance, Methodism compromises what Fielding believes is the most accurate method of interpreting moral character because at the same time it renders good works inconsequential to salvation, it fails to provide much viable evidence of moral character. Instead, Methodism trusts individuals to represent themselves accurately even though the subjective nature of assurance's "warming of the heart" and reliance on testimony can potentially provide protection to an individual with ill intentions. As such, it is this element of trust—the counterbalance to the importance of faith in Methodist doctrine—that Fielding remains skeptical

about in the novels and which drives his search for a system by which to identify and expose hypocrites. Without the certainty that good works provide as evidence of character, his system of judging character based on behavior must be abandoned and all individuals must be encountered with distrust and skepticism, by which the bonds of society that form communities are weakened.

In "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men" Fielding states that hypocrisy poses serious dangers to society because "the Business of such a Man's Life [the hypocrite's life] is to procure Praise, by acquiring and maintaining an undeserved Character; so is his utmost Care employed to deprive those who have an honest Claim to the Character himself affects only, of all the Emoluments which would otherwise arise to them from it" (Essay 211). Provoked by this danger, in the body of the essay Fielding concisely outlines the ways through which an individual may assess the moral character of other individuals in society and considers in turn the strengths and weaknesses of each method. First, Fielding examines the efficacy of physiognomy as a marker of moral character. However, he ultimately concludes that, while the countenance is capable of illuminating character, it is too difficult for the average person to interpret accurately; or, as he explains, "the true Symptoms being finer, and less glaring, make no Impression on our Physiognomist; while the grosser Appearances of Affectation are sure to attract his Eye, and deceive his Judgment" (Essay 196). With outward appearances deemed largely ineffective, Fielding moves on to examine actions and behaviors. While Fielding still demands a diligent and careful observer, he deduces that "Mankind would be little liable to Deceit (at least much less than they are) if they would believe their own Eyes, and judge of Men by what they actually see them perform towards those with whom they are most closely connected" (Essay 221).

Accordingly, Fielding accomplishes two important things: first, he argues that we must deal with hypocrites by learning to recognize them in society, and second, he asserts that the most reliable way to do that is to rely upon observable behaviors, particularly those behaviors directed toward the observer herself or himself.

Throughout the "Essay" Fielding sees himself as a "Champion[s] of the innocent and undesigning" (181). As he points out in the opening of the "Essay," "artful and cunning" members of society have armed themselves with systems that allow them to "impose on the rest of the World," while the "innocent and undesigning" have no complementary system through which to protect themselves (181). Fielding's hope is to provide such a system, and, in doing so, he implies that he, unlike many of the "innocent and undesigning," does have the ability to distinguish the "artful and cunning" in society. Indeed, he states in the "Essay" that uncovering such hypocrites and other morally corrupt individuals requires "an accurate Observer" (185). Ultimately, Fielding concedes that even though "the Passions of Men do commonly imprint sufficient Marks on the Countenance," "Physiognomy is of so little Use and Credit in the World" (188). Instead, the "Actions of Men seem to be the surest Interpreters of their Thoughts" (197).

Just like Fielding, as the accurate observer, seeks to do in the "Essay," the conventional satiric responses to Methodism also aimed to expose "the pernicious Designs of that detestable Fiend, Hypocrisy (Essay 186). In Albert Lyles' thorough examination in *Methodism Mocked* of the many various types of satiric responses to Methodism in the eighteenth century, it is hypocrisy that is enumerated as the third greatest danger that prompted the attacks (29). However, hypocrisy underlies all of the categories Lyles isolates in his study, from attacks on enthusiasm to attacks on Methodist practice, preaching, and conversion. In each case, the

distrust of Methodism and of Methodists emerges because its theology—through its doctrine of assurance and the privileging of faith over good works that results—demands that the individuals' experience be self-verifying: "To the anti-Methodist the Methodist claim to inspiration was clearly invalid: he had no proof," and "following in the track delineated by Locke, saw that the Methodist was totally unable to verify his claim" (Lyles 37).

In order to express the purpose and conclusion of the "Essay" through representations of Methodism, Fielding's representations in the novels are filtered through a tradition of satirical treatment of Methodism that extended before and after his own lifetime. It is because of the influence of such satires that the significant and substantial role Methodism plays in the novels often goes unnoticed or unstudied. Too often, Fielding's allusions appear to be merely humorous or argumentative detours in the plot. Satire, however, at least for Fielding, must have an instructive element, even as it ruthlessly attacks its subject. As Michael McKeon argues in *The Secret History of Domesticity*, though authors consciously and carefully differentiated their own satires from libel, satire "does not necessarily lose touch with the particularity of private individuals" (109). In *Joseph Andrews*, as McKeon points out, Fielding "called himself a satirist rather than a libeler because '[Fielding] describe[s] not Men, but Manners; not an Individual, but a Species….not to expose one pitiful Wretch…but to hold the Glass to thousands in their Closets'" (98). In other words, Fielding's satire, in targeting a specific individual or group, should make the readers recognize in themselves and in their environment the qualities being satirized.

In the case of Fielding's satire of Methodism, though the Methodists are the victims of the satiric attack, they serve as placeholders for hypocrites of all kinds. In that function,

representations of Methodists provide a warning to readers of the real and urgent dangers hypocrites pose to society whether that danger be the greed represented in *Shamela* and *Tom Jones* or the theft and rape in *Amelia*. Again, the purpose of satire is, at least in part, to educate and to protect the unassuming, not unlike the basic premise of "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men." The ability of Fielding, however, to "hold the Glass to thousands" is "enabled by generalizing from the realm of the actual to a realm that is virtual but also concrete" (McKeon 109); that is to say, the fictional representation does not avoid the particular images of Methodists. In fact, it is "Only within this general realm [that] the private transaction of ethical improvement be achieved" (109). The satire of Methodism in the novels provides a vehicle for a broader didactic purpose as Fielding makes the fictional world he creates concrete, thereby particularizing a real-world problem in the fictional text.

With the relationship between Methodism, satire, and the need to accurately interpret character in mind, I read the Methodist scenes in Fielding's novels against his "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men." The "Essay," which seeks to present the reader with an accurate method of interpreting any individual's moral character, provides us with the very definitions and theories upon which Fielding founds his fictional exploration of misrepresentation in the novels. With these explanatory notes as guideposts, we can read the Methodist scenes as an extension of Fielding's greater project in which Methodism is more important for its impact on the ability to read moral character in society than it is for its deviation from Anglican orthodoxy or its entertainment value when represented satirically.

* * * * *

In *Character's Theater: Genre and Identity on the Eighteenth-Century English Stage*, a study of eighteenth-century theatrical representation, Lisa Freeman carries out a reading of Fielding's " An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men" in which she traces his attempt to locate physical signs of hypocrisy (25-27). As Freeman rightly points out from the "Essay," differentiating moral individuals from immoral ones is completely "dependent on the perceptive abilities of the observer" (26); or, as Fielding says himself, the inability to read an individual's character in their countenance is "owing chiefly to want of Skill in the Observer" (Essay 182). It is the problematic nature of this dependence on the observer that is at the heart of the novels, as well as in the culture of the time in general. We see the "problem of defining an individual" that "involved conflicts over the value of outward appearances, or surfaces, as 'real' indices of persons" (Freeman 21) in the abounding misrecognitions staged in the novels; for instance, Tom Jones is misunderstood as a corrupt rabble-rouser by the likes of Square, Thwackum, Squire Western, the Blifils, Bridget, and Mrs. Whitefield, just to name a few, while Fielding will ultimately make him a moral exemplar. And, while Tom is guilty of several serious moral transgressions in the course of his maturation, the complexity those transgressions create when considered alongside his genuinely charitable actions gets to the heart of Fielding's point: that accurately interpreting moral character takes skill and that it is just as dangerous to misjudge a good person as it is to misjudge a bad one.

While many of the characters who misjudge Tom do so because they are motivated by self-interest and are benefiting from the circumstances that pose problems for Tom, a good number are struggling with the changing concept of character that Freeman describes in her opening chapter, "Staged Identities." In that chapter, Freeman traces the evolution of the term

character itself, illustrating how its earliest associations prove problematic when held over into the eighteenth-century. As she points out, "Prior to the eighteenth century, 'character' carried primarily literal denotations alluding most often to a 'distinctive mark impressed, engraved or otherwise formed" (Freeman 20). What Freeman suggests is that until the eighteenth century, characters were perceived being stable and as having "fixed and naturalized" so that through a one-to-one correspondence, value was represented on the surface of the "character" (Freeman 20). She then argues that later, when the meaning of "character" came to embody multiple figurative meanings "marked by an almost chaotic dissociation from physical or objective points of reference" such as stage roles or personal attributes or qualities, character lost what previously seemed to be "its self-evident or transparent signature" (Freeman 22). It is this increasing dissociation with "objective points of reference" that drives writers such as Fielding, and eventually even John Wesley in his essay "The Character of a Methodist," to map out the correlation between "character" and its representations (either visual or behavioral). Though differing in their theological perspectives, Fielding and Wesley both notice the same thing about character: as Freeman states it, that once it "stood alone signifying worth and value in society" (Freeman 23), it now "required skills in observation, penetration, and interpretation" (Freeman 22).

Just as anti-Methodists like Fielding were struggling with the social consequences of Methodist doctrine, Methodism as a movement and Wesley as its leader were struggling with the same issues of appearance and representation. In two different documents, "Advice to the People Called Methodists" and "The Character of a Methodist," Wesley tries to resolve the tensions between the intensely personal nature of the doctrine of assurance and the certainty that

morally corrupt people will find it readily available for their own selfish gain and pose as the recipients of grace. In his "Advice to the People Called Methodists" Wesley specifically tries to dispel the problems arising from the privileging of the experience of the individual, urging his followers to be conscious that they provide evidence of their moral purity in their appearance and behavior even though all God requires of them is their faith. For instance, Wesley's definition of Methodists as "a people who profess to pursue…holiness of heart and life, *inward* and *outward* conformity in all things to the revealed will of God," reveals his emphasis on the need for an outward verification of interior moral character (Advice 352, emphasis mine). Similarly, in "The Character of a Methodist" Wesley enumerates numerous characteristics of a true Methodist including an assertion that "As he has time, he 'does good unto all men;' unto neighbors and strangers, friends and enemies: And that in every possible kind" (346). In other words then, Wesley sees a place for good works in Methodism, even if they do not serve the same purpose for him as they do for Fielding and other more orthodox Anglicans.

That lack of good works as evidence of assurance and moral character that proves not just problematic, but dangerous for Fielding is articulated in the Wesley's famous 1739 sermon entitled *Free Grace*, in which we find the argument for privileging faith over works that is at the heart of Fielding's criticism. Wesley accomplishes three important things in this sermon: he emphasizes the value of each individual human being by claiming that Christ died for *all* people, rather than just the "elect;" he privileges an individual's relationship with God through the doctrine of assurance; and, he presents an argument for God's identity, calling upon those made in His image to seek it as an example. The essence of the doctrine of *Free Grace* then is that "The Grace or Love of God, whence cometh our Salvation, is Free in all, and Free for all" (5);

that is to say, that salvation is available to all who believe, and that it is a gift from God, in "no way depending on any Power, or Merit in Man" (6). While to most Anglicans, including Fielding with his admiration for the Latitudinarian ministers, "Merit in Man" would indicate good works, in *Free Grace* it appears to have no place in Methodist doctrine, even alongside faith.

Whereas good works provide socially verifiable proof of an individual's moral character, according to Methodist doctrine, the "assurance" of salvation, or "a feeling of Possession of God in your Heart, wrought in you by the Holy Ghost; or *The Witness of God's Spirit with your Spirit, that you are a Child of God*" is the only external proof of character (*Free Grace* 13). As evidence of salvation—God's judgment of an individual's morality—assurance would be dependent on the integrity of the individual experiencing it. Yet, as we know, Fielding's strategy for exposing hypocrisy relies upon improving the observer's skill rather than attempting to influence the subject's (in this case, the Methodist's) self-representation. Since assurance is a condition that is only knowable to the subject (the Methodist), the doctrine eliminates objective evidence, and in doing so, makes it nearly impossible for an individual to read a Methodist's moral character by any of the methods Fielding provides. Instead, the only proof of salvation is the extreme subjectivity of personal experience in the form of "a feeling" in the heart (13). Yet, generalizing that all Methodists are genuine and moral or that they are all immoral hypocrites are both equally destructive—hence Fielding's desire for an accurate method of interpretation by which to sort the two groups of people—and so the system proposed in the "Essay" reaches an impasse with the doctrine of assurance.

Considering this problematic subjectivity of assurance, the anti-Methodist satirists understood the discernment of such a "feeling" as contestable only by a claim of dishonesty: either an act of hypocrisy or "a false belief in the inspiration of the Holy Spirit" (Lyles 37). Yet, as is evident in his sermon on *The Nature of Enthusiasm,* Wesley too was concerned about the connection between assurance, enthusiasm, and hypocrisy. In fact, Wesley sets out not to challenge the definition of "enthusiasm," but rather to differentiate the Methodist from the common enthusiast. In *The Nature of Enthusiasm* Wesley's last points all warn that enthusiasm is dangerous because it can so easily obstruct the Truth, allowing one to "fancy [they] are a Christian when [they] are not" (59). Wesley's explication of the danger associated with enthusiasm in this statement captures the fears that led satirists of Methodism to equate enthusiasm with hypocrisy. The danger for Wesley, therefore, is that individuals may consider themselves to be Christian when they are not, which is not unrelated to Fielding's concerns because Wesley's concern is an admission of a serious problem in the practice of Methodism. Wesley's own misgivings about the evangelical and enthusiastic nature of Methodism pinpoint the weaknesses of the doctrine that facilitate morally corrupt individuals' abuse of Methodism, which is makes the relationship between the doctrine of assurance and the ability to accurately interpret moral character problematic. If good people can innocently misrepresent their character through their evangelism, then it is at least as easy for self-interested, designing individuals to do the same on purpose. For Fielding, this complicates his understanding of moral character by illustrating that while people cannot recognize hypocrites, at the same time they cannot recognize the innocent and moral individuals too. Here the complexity of "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men" that is ultimately depicted in the conflicted message of Fielding's final

novel *Amelia* emerges: the system by which we interpret moral character must be *accurate* because the alternative is to encounter both good and bad people with skepticism, which itself is harmful to society.

Transferring this theological argument back into the realm of Fielding's novels, Catherine Ingrassia exemplifies in her introduction to *Shamela* the way in which the Methodist individual's experience of God is not to be trusted. In describing Fielding's critique of the novel as propagated by authors like Samuel Richardson, she cites such novels' associations with "titillation, intentional deception, and a more 'feminized' appeal" (12). Then, in her discussion of the novel and the literary market, Ingrassia asserts, "what was sold often contained, to Fielding's mind, excessive emotionalism, compromised morality, and inauthentic experiences" (13). Ingrassia shows us here that both Methodism and the novel are guilty of indulging in emotional excess and sensibility, though sincerely, in order to proclaim truth, which here relies upon the self-verifiability of individual experience. What Fielding finds problematic about most novels—an approval and endorsement of deception, immorality, and inauthenticity—is exactly what he despises about Methodism and its privileging of faith and the moment of assurance. Again, only in the satires is enthusiasm connected with hypocrisy, but in Fielding's case, this connection exposes an underlying assumption that Fielding finally succumbs to making in his last novel *Amelia*: the number of bad people in the world vastly outnumbers the good people, and so to protect ourselves we must be suspicious of everyone—especially those such as the Methodists who appear to claim that character need not be supported by observable behavior. Yet, at least early in Fielding's career it is this tenuous connection between the novel's development as a genre and popular characterizations of Methodist doctrine and practice—

enthusiasm and hypocrisy—that results in his choice to draw upon satiric representations of Methodism in his novels.

So, if it is the plight of the observer to distinguish between moral and immoral people in society, then the observer must have a method by which to accurately assess moral character. In a society in which character no longer implies a one-to-one correspondence between surfaces and values, it appears that the disastrous result would be a society in which the "artful and cunning" have an uncontestable advantage over the "innocent and undesigning" (Essay 181). Fielding fictionalizes this problem in the novels with their focus on the dangers the hypocrite poses both to society collectively and to individuals. In doing so, Fielding champions the plight of the naïve, good people (just as in the "Essay"), trying to at least make them aware of the dangers surrounding them if he cannot prevent them. Methodism is an important part of this project because it prevents any such method from being successful by eliminating evidence of morality besides individual testimony; with neither physiognomy nor behavior as a guide, the observer is left with only the individual's claim.

Yet finally, as Fielding goes on to tell us in the "Essay," one of the most frequent causes of mistaken judgment of character is "when we take their own Words against their Actions" (Essay 198). Words, as agents and signifiers of behavior, also hold little strength for Fielding, and so as far as he is concerned, Methodism represents the worst case scenario—character has become a purely figurative word, devoid of any concrete, stable meaning, so that we are left with no way to assign it value. The result would be a world in which individuals profit from lies like Shamela does, are at the mercy of those same self-interested liars as Tom Jones is, and eventually have their honor and virtue violently transgressed by them, as in the case of Amelia.

Essentially, these major novels plot a trajectory in which Fielding envisions a world in which there is, in fact, no way to identify morally corrupt individuals.

The allusions to Methodism also follow this trajectory. In *Shamela*, Methodism is fairly innocuous, providing a laugh for the audience as much as it articulates the character of hypocrites like Shamela and Parson Williams. However, in *Tom Jones,* the tenor of Fielding's references to Methodism become more discursive and less apt to provide entertainment; while the only one hurt by Shamela and Parson William's lies in that text is the equally corrupt Mr. B, the dangers posed by the characters associated with Methodism in *Tom Jones* seek to undermine Tom's natural goodness and charity. Finally, in *Amelia*, characters with Methodist associations are not only dangerous, but simply sinister. What remains important though is that Methodism allows Fielding to plot this trajectory *in terms of the problem of character* that he sets forth in "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men."

* * * * *

While Fielding was vehemently opposed to Methodism, it is not his primary objective to vilify Methodists at every opportunity. Instead, he uses aspects of the doctrine in order to illustrate its serious potential consequences for society beyond the realm of theology. In the "Essay" as well as in the novels, Fielding's first priority is to illuminate the dangers of society and to educate the "innocent and undesigning" how best to avoid them, and in doing so, his literary project is charitable in itself. If his use of Methodism were not in tandem with his comprehensive moral philosophy, then it would be no different than that of the many hack satirists, but Fielding's project is not selfish—it is fundamentally philanthropic. While Fielding surely got some satisfaction out of his depictions of the more corrupt Methodists, his use of

Methodism first and foremost exemplifies and explores the plight of the individual in society who is forced to confront hypocrisy and moral corruption with only the uncertain guide of observable behavior.

In "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men," Fielding tries to reconcile the old and new denotations of "character," first insisting that the value of a person (their character) is indeed reflected visibly on their face—on the surface—then, admitting that, as Lisa Freeman puts it, "character [is] too protean to hold a stable value" (Freeman 24). The uncertain and unstable condition of character is ultimately what leads Fielding to turn to observable behavior as a way through which to interpret moral character in the "Essay." Then, in the novels, this turn is articulated through the Methodist scenes and characters who, through their doctrine and practice render even the observation of behavior futile, complicating the solution Fielding proposes in the "Essay." Ultimately, Methodism is the perfect example of the problem Freeman articulates: how do you assign value to people when their identity is "the unstable product of staged contests between interpretable surfaces" (Freeman 27)? How do you assess someone's moral character when you cannot depend on actions or appearances to provide accurate evidence of interior morality?

In Chapter 1, "Representations of Character in *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews*: From Satiric Burlesque to Satiric Discourse," I argue that *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews* serve to isolate and establish in fiction the issue that drives Fielding's literary endeavors throughout his life: the need for the ability to recognize hypocrites within society. Yet, even as *Shamela* exhibits parodic, melodramatic representations of Methodism, Fielding is already modulating those conventional satiric images into the thoughtful and theological discursive satire of *Joseph*

*Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. Central to this modulation is Fielding's juxtaposition of the thoroughly stereotypical Methodist in Parson Williams with Parson Tickletext, a naïve and gullible reader who is attracted to and fooled by what Fielding sees as the Methodist undertones of Samuel Richardson's novel *Pamela*. Tickletext, though himself a satire of a Methodist, plays the part of the victim; yet, in the end, he is saved by the instruction of an orthodox Anglican minister, Parson Oliver.

While Fielding does not yet begin to make any specific claims about a system or method of interpreting moral character as he does in the "Essay," he does demonstrate the problem the "Essay" attempts to rectify and makes a case through Parson Oliver's correction of Tickletext's reading that hypocrisy can be revealed and the innocent protected from becoming the unwitting victims of hypocrites. Then, after Fielding sets this foundation in *Shamela*, in *Joseph Andrews* Methodism becomes a subject of debate, and through that debate, Fielding explains many of the connections between hypocrisy, theatricality, and Methodism that he depicts in his characterization of Parson Williams. So, from providing a fictionalized depiction of the dangers hypocrisy poses in *Shamela* to a debate between two parsons and a bookseller about the popularity and characteristics of Methodism in *Joseph Andrews*, in his two novels reacting to Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* Fielding readies his audience for the solution to the problem of interpreting character that he poses in his masterpiece, *Tom Jones*.

Chapter 2, "*Tom Jones*: Faith, Good Works, and Interpreting Moral Character," illustrates how Fielding's masterpiece expands the discursive treatment of Methodism by integrating the explanatory discourse of *Joseph Andrews* into the fabric of both the plot and character development. In *Tom Jones* Fielding moves on to explore Methodism through discourse rather

than through exaggerated characterization in his depictions of Doctor Blifil, Captain Blifil, and finally the son of Captain Blifil and Bridget Allworthy. Here, the debate over good works is filtered through a juxtaposition of religious philosophies so that as works are debated so is theology and vice versa. Through the course of the novel the Blifils, with their Methodist inclinations and associations, act without any regard for others, whereas Tom, who is more closely allied with the Latitudinarian view of Anglican practice that values good works, is basically a good person though he makes numerous serious mistakes.

In *Tom Jones* Fielding builds upon his work in *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews* by providing and testing a solution to the problem he isolates in those earlier novels. The specific problem that Fielding establishes in *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews* is that Methodism, because of its doctrine of assurance—which emphasizes that it is faith alone that God requires for salvation—renders good works of little importance to its followers. However, the consequences of this problem extend beyond its religious context for Fielding: the Methodist's privileging of faith over works previews a world where actions are no longer available as means for interpreting moral character. Fielding thereby uses his masterpiece to place his assertion that good works are absolutely necessary on trial before the reader, juxtaposing characters who value good works with characters who do not. In order to articulate exactly how good works are beneficial and their lack in society is detrimental, Fielding turns to the opposing religious philosophies Latitudinarianism and Methodism. The result, of course, is a very persuasive case against Methodism as a religious doctrine and for good works as practical markers of moral character. However, in Fielding's final novel the structure that makes his use of Methodism in *Tom Jones* so effective dissolves.

In Chapter 3, "Methodism and the Complication of Character in *Amelia*," we see the final disintegration of the world in which the dangerous effects of hypocrisy can neither be represented nor remedied effectively through a satire of Methodism. From the minor archetypal Methodist pickpocket, to the mock sermon exposing Colonel Bath's adulterous intentions to Amelia during a masquerade, to the hero's conversion to orthodox Anglicanism, this final novel integrates the stereotypical satiric representation of Methodism into the fabric not only of plot and characterization, but also into the fabric of society. Whereas in *Shamela* Fielding establishes a problem and in *Tom Jones* he presents a solution for it, the conclusion of *Amelia* is as ambiguous and troubling as its beginning. In the first part of the novel, Fielding presents a stereotypical representation of a Methodist as a liar and a thief, yet the hero, Booth, fails to recognize the Methodist's hypocrisy through appearances or behaviors as he makes judgments based on appearances at some times and on behaviors at others with no apparent pattern. As such, Booth's inability to recognize hypocrites is problematic not because Methodism disguises hypocrites, but instead because it shows that Booth is unable to follow any sort of system of interpretation at all.

In the latter part of the novel, Fielding's final representation of Methodism is absorbed by the machinery of the masquerade—a tool Fielding often uses to represent the dangers of duplicity, theatricality, and hypocrisy. Methodism is really only alluded to in the context of the masquerade with the result that particular Methodists cannot be distinguished within the crowd so that they can no longer function as scapegoats. Instead, there is only the shadow of an image of an informal Methodist meeting, and as it draws in the diverse crowd of the masquerade, all of its attendants become Methodists, at least symbolically. In *Amelia*, first Fielding's system of

interpretation breaks down, and then its necessity becomes more apparent than ever. With this conclusion, Fielding comes full circle back to the problem illustrated in *Shamela*, except that now at the end of his career he offers no alternative solution and therein ends his assault on Methodism.

Consequently, over the course of the novels Fielding's use of Methodism becomes not just another reaction to the outward representation of Methodists (as per the satiric tradition), but rather a sophisticated use of Methodism's main problem—the malleability of character for which it seems to allow—that happens to complicate Fielding's own obsession with finding a system by which to expose hypocrites. For Fielding, the idea that people might not be able to recognize and expose hypocrites before they take advantage of us represents one of the greatest dangers that society poses to human beings. His novels are filled with self-interested hypocrites and in each novel the dangers they present grow more harmful, from schemes motivated by greed and hopes of inheritance such as Shamela's ploy to marry Squire Booby and Blifil's attempts to sully Tom's reputation to the schemes motivated by lust and jealousy that threaten Amelia Booth's body. While we can see the progression from novel to novel in the severity and sophistication of the crimes, we can also map it through the representations of Methodism that draw the focus to the doctrine of assurance. If, as Fielding asserts in the "Essay," actions are the only hope for exposing hypocrites, then Fielding's satiric critique of Methodism takes away that hope and shows us what that world would look like. However, as Fielding's satire of Methodism becomes more refined, there are signs that he begins to recognize that the problem hypocrisy presents is much larger and much more universal than his critique of Methodism can express. Ultimately, the satiric representations of Methodist hypocrites are integrated into a society overrun with

dangerous hypocrites, and Fielding's use of Methodism and the doctrine of assurance remain as evidence of the importance of observable actions to the battle against hypocrisy.

# Chapter 1
## Representing Character in *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews*: From Satiric Burlesque to Satiric Discourse

In Henry Fielding's work—drama, prose, and essays—there is a permeating fascination with the possibility, or even ability, of a human being to know for certain the state of any other individual's moral character. More specifically, Fielding remains obsessed throughout his career with exposing hypocrites as well as the detrimental effects they have on the innocent, unassuming individuals they victimize. In *Shamela*, published in 1741, and *Joseph Andrews*, published ten months later in 1742, we are able to see the initial stages of the process through which Fielding matured as a novelist as he determines how he will approach the problems surrounding the relationship between moral character and society in his prose fiction. For instance, while *Shamela* retains a clearly self-conscious theatrical thinness in its development of characters, Fielding quickly begins to moderate that melodramatic influence in *Joseph Andrews*, dissolving parody into discourse. When both novels are considered as responses to the issues of authenticity raised in Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, Fielding's expansion of the references to grace in that novel into a satiric attack on Methodism in *Shamela* and in *Joseph Andrews* allows Fielding to place the problems raised about authenticity within a specific, local context. Following this move to narrow the scope of his concern for authenticity, the 1743 work "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men" Fielding examines three methods by which to assess an individual's moral character—observing physiognomy, the individual's behavior toward one's self, and the individual's behavior toward others—in an effort to circumvent hypocrisy, which he sees to be one of the greatest dangers within and to society. Published in quick succession, these three texts approach the problem of assessing moral character through

different means, but together they portray the way in which the problem resists a definition and articulation as much as it resists the solution Fielding sets out to find in the "Essay."

**Religion, Hypocrisy, and Interpreting Moral Character**

In "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men," Fielding defines hypocrisy and exemplifies its problems through Christianity more broadly, particularly by questioning the apparent sanctity of its adherents. Of "censorious Sanctity" (believing that one has quality of holiness or purity that another does not) that "never is, nor can be sincere," Fielding says, "Is not such a Sanctity the true Mark of that Hypocrisy which in many Places of Scripture, and particularly in the twenty third Chapter of St. *Matthew*, is so bitterly inveighed against" (Essay 207). By describing sanctity as the "Mark" of hypocrisy, Fielding shows that sanctity is important to his discussion because it is an observable attribute of religion that signals moral corruption. When Fielding goes on to state that one who exhibits the sign of sanctity is "a most detestable Character in Society" who malignly targets "the sincere and open-hearted" (Essay 207), he illuminates his investment not only in character, but also in religion as the basis for morality. For Fielding, morality is derived from Christianity, as his discussion in the "Essay" attests when he ultimately turns to scripture, and even the words of Christ in order to further interrogate sanctity (hypocrisy). Of the character of sanctimonious individuals, Fielding quotes Christ: *"It devours Widows Houses; it makes its Proselytes two-fold more the Children of Hell; it omits the weightier Matters of the Law, Judgment, Mercy, and Faith; it strains off a Gnat, and swallows a Camel; it is full of Exertion and Excess*" (Essay 208). With morality and character linked together in "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men" in which Fielding

attempts to outline an accurate system of interpreting character, it is only natural that religion play an important role in Fielding's exploration of character and hypocrisy in the novels.

As such, when we consider that "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men" was published between *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, we see an important progression in Fielding's changing view of the nature of moral character that can be traced through his treatment of Methodism. Fielding's first novel *Shamela* introduces Methodism as a way to articulate the danger of the inability to accurately interpret the moral character of hypocrites by exemplifying the problematic relationship between appearances and motivations. In contrast to the standard satires of Methodism in which its adherents are guilty of lust and avarice, Fielding's satirical use of the movement presents multiple types of Methodists, suggesting that "Methodist" is not a universal term that can be applied systematically to groups of people.[2] In so doing, the highly melodramatic depictions of characters in the parody do not seem to include the typecasting of the "Methodist" that might be expected according to other satires. Without the absolutism of a generalization or label, the interpretation of character becomes much more difficult. However, in suggesting that Methodists may not all be of the same moral character, Fielding has an opportunity to illuminate exactly what about the doctrine makes it appear that Methodists are all hypocrites.

Yet, instead of representing the Methodist as a type or humour character in which one Methodist is the same as any other, the flagrantly hypocritical Parson Williams is tempered by the supreme naiveté of Parson Tickletext, posing the question: what makes Methodism an effective example of the problematic nature of assessing character? For the purposes of the

[2] Said another way, the many mainstream satires of Methodism present "the Methodist" as a self-explanatory reference, perhaps a type of modernized humour character.

burlesque in *Shamela*, Fielding draws on the standard satires of Methodism in the characterization of Parson Williams, a blatant hypocrite who uses his interpretation of the scriptures in order to satisfy his own lust. In contrast, Parson Tickletext represents a different type of character associated with Methodism whose duplicity rests in his investment in enthusiasm (his pretension to a Methodist relationship with God), or, in other words, his belief that Methodist doctrine does indeed make a personal relationship. In the end, Tickletext proves misguided and, therefore, an exceptionally effective exemplar of the danger the hypocritical Williams poses to society. In turn, through the contrast between Tickletext and Williams, Fielding represents Methodism with a complexity not often acknowledged in satirical representations. By framing the story of Shamela and the stereotypical Methodist Parson Williams within the correspondence of Parsons Tickletext and Oliver, Fielding suggests that Methodists in the reality that exists beyond the novel come in many different forms, some of which may not be as menacing as the hypocritical Parson Williams and might also be alterable. When Parson Oliver writes to Parson Tickletext about Methodism, "but what Scandal doth it throw on the Order to have one bad Member" (*Sh*. 274), Fielding gets to the heart of the problem that arises when the effect of representational powers are considered in the context of religion: in this case, with Methodist doctrine providing such an effective disguise for hypocrites, how do you separate dangerous individuals like Williams from innocent ones like Tickletext? Fielding then, though no friend of Methodism, rejects equating "Methodist" and "hypocrite" as stereotypical satires of Methodism tended to do, and instead examines what makes that equation tempting to accept by uncovering the motivations of Methodism characters and by treating them as individuals rather than reducing them to a homogenous group.

**Stereotypical Representations of Methodism in *Shamela***

Fielding's first major reference to Methodism, which is thoroughly stereotypical, appears in Letter V of *Shamela*, written by Henrietta Maria, Shamela's mother, to her daughter (*Sh.* 244-45). The letter tells us that Shamela has already had a child with Parson Williams, for which Henrietta criticizes Shamela, but soon after explains that she merely meant that Shamela should "take care to be well paid before-hand"(*Sh.* 245). For Henrietta, the value of actions and of people is measured in temporal rather than spiritual terms, and like Parson Williams later, Henrietta distinguishes between "Flesh and Spirit" (*Sh.* 269). This complete separation of the temporal realm from the spiritual realm is made possible by Wesley's doctrine of assurance (which in privileging faith over good works seems to make earthly actions less important than spiritual ones), or rather, Henrietta's and Williams interpretation of it. Both Henrietta and Williams, in misconstruing the doctrine of assurance, assume that receiving God's grace once ensures their salvation forever, whereas Wesley writes that assurance differs from election not only in that the individual can know from God that they are saved by His Grace, but also that once gained that grace can be lost (*Free Grace* 15). Essentially, this misunderstanding of Methodist doctrine, whether resulting from ignorance or deception, allows Henrietta and Williams to sever the causal relationship between life on Earth and the afterlife in Heaven. In so doing, temporal matters become distinct from spiritual ones with different and unrelated ends so that what was once a sin and impediment to salvation (the nature of Shamela's and Williams sexual relationship) becomes for the Methodist Henrietta only a capitalist venture that provides for Shamela's temporal existence (prostitution). For Henrietta and for Williams, the assurance of God's grace makes their actions on Earth inconsequential. This is problematic for the

fundamentally religious Fielding because not only does it remove individual accountability for one's actions, but in the process it also removes the interpretive power of behavior upon which Fielding relies so heavily as we see in the "Essay."

In Fielding's second direct allusion to the Methodist movement, we see the stereotype continue when Parson Williams distorts a sermon on the text of Ecclesiastes 7:16—"Be not righteous over much, neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself?" (*Sh.* 253). While "Be not Righteous over-much" is a reference to an anti-Methodist sermon delivered in 1739 by Dr. Joseph Trapp that initiated an important and prolific pamphlet war over the Methodist issue (footnote in *Sh.* 253), here the issue is inverted. Fielding's use of the sermon and the notion of righteousness relates to enthusiasm, which in eighteenth-century parlance signals false inspiration and overconfidence in one's knowledge and even dangerous fanaticism by the most conservative writers. As such, to be "righteous over much" would have been understood as a form of hypocrisy in itself, while Williams even disregards that in his abuse of the passage, insisting on what may be far worse: that one can be "righteous" by doing nothing at all and privileging faith over works. Shamela recounts that "the Bible doth not require too much Goodness of us" and that it is "not what we do, but what we believe, that must save us" (*Sh.* 253). Williams' interpretation of scripture—a "tickling" of the text and a perversion of Wesley's doctrine of assurance—ensures that Shamela's greed and lust will not prevent her from attaining the grace of God. Essentially, Williams' interpretation, which Shamela is so excited by, absolves the individual from any responsibility for his or her actions. As such, the actions by which Fielding wants to judge moral character in the later "Essay" become inconsequential to those who perform them, complicating their ability to indicate moral states. The representation of the

abuse of scripture by Methodists thereby complicates the role and meaning of actions, which is a fundamental part of Fielding's solution to the problem of interpreting moral character in the "Essay." Consistency in appearances and behaviors, Fielding's interpretive rubric, is then undermined in Williams's Methodism.

In one of the best examples of this destabilization and its effects on the ability to interpret moral character, Williams justifies continuing his liaisons with Shamela after her marriage, explaining, "Dear, you have two Husbands, one the Object of your Love, and to satisfy your Desire; the other the Object of Necessity, and to furnish you with those other Conveniences" (*Sh.* 270). Here Williams bases his argument on the claim that the "Flesh and Spirit were two distinct matters" (*Sh.* 269). This distinction, a corruption of Christian theology (not to mention Methodist theology), refers to the relationship set forth between Heaven and Earth—the realm of God and salvation, and the realm of earthly concerns, which are secondary. Again, the Methodist emphasis on faith over works that results from absolving individual responsibility makes Fielding's satiric critique possible. The emphasis on assurance as an experience that takes place in the midst of temporal life blurs the distinction between heaven and earth. Furthermore, individuals have no reason to be charitable and every reason to be self-serving when God's grace requires only faith. With selfishness seemingly rewarded by Methodist doctrine, Fielding gains the opportunity to elevate Williams' adulterous relationship with Shamela to the status of spiritual concerns, placing Squire Booby secondary to himself as a representation of the transient, temporal world.

**Connecting Theatricality, Hypocrisy, and Character**

In eighteenth-century British society Methodism, hypocrisy, and theatricality were often connected, providing Fielding with a catalogue of conventional descriptions of Methodism from which to borrow and upon which to build as he makes the same connection in his novels. One such example of the assumptions about Methodism articulated in texts contemporary to Fielding's can be found in a series of volumes of *The Gentleman's Magazine* from the year 1739.[3] In the May edition, Volume 9, we find an essay addressed to a fictional character, "Common Sense," to whom the author speaks of the need to "expose" such "False Notions and Schemes of Religion" as Methodism (256). As support of this claim, the author links Methodism with a "Method of acting," clearly implying that such "severe Notions of Christianity" are not genuine and are only a mere outward show, like an actor playing a role at the theater (257). So, while the name "Methodism" was meant to exemplify a method of Christian living, here it has been framed instead as a method of acting, and specifically, a method of acting that allows one to represent himself or herself as having a sound moral character for the benefits that recognition provides within the society.

Lisa Freeman argues in her book *Character's Theater* that the changing definition of "character" over the course of the century (Freeman 20) reflects the same instability present in Fielding's conclusion to the "Essay:" a person's character must be static rather than mutable so that individuals may depend on the correspondence between outward representation via behavior and interior moral character. For Freeman, character is derived "from a dialectic between

[3] It is significant that the volumes referenced run from May of 1739 until September, coinciding with Wesley and Whitefield's first forays into field preaching in defiance of the Conventicle Act prohibiting such practices.

presentation and perception" (15). By reading Methodism in Fielding's novels alongside the "Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men," we find that Methodism necessarily makes the perception of an individual's moral character impossible, largely due to the privileging of faith over good works, which we see in the more refined argument against Methodism that Fielding creates in *Tom Jones*. For people who value good works as a way to judge moral character, the doctrine of assurance changes the terms of the dialectic. Whereas Fielding's formulation of the dialectic requires good works for accurate interpretation, Methodist doctrine demands that other presentations of character be valued, such as testimony.

*Shamela*, however, is a testament to these pervasive anxieties and is what Freeman recognizes as the inherit theatricality of the novel as it tries to create a "double illusion of transparent, material subjects" (16). The purpose of *Shamela* as a parody and as a farce is to exemplify the difficulty of assessing moral character, and to remind the public that the danger of hypocrisy is its ability to mask its own presence. In the move from an epistolary form with sketched, flat characters to a third person narrative with a set of more rounded characters with whom we are sympathetic, Fielding does not disavow theatricality, but rather suggests that hypocrisy is a form of theatricality that is more complex and more difficult to ascertain than *Shamela* would suggest or allow.

In the content of the letters that comprise the text of *Shamela*, Fielding chooses to expose the "sham" of Pamela's character through language—specifically diction—just as Williams' "tickling" of scripture exposes his hypocrisy further emphasizing the role of behavioral evidence in the interpretation of moral character. The most prominent of Shamela's abuses of language is her concern for something that is very different from virtue—"*vartue*." In *Natural Masques* Jill

Campbell describes “vartue” as a “high blown word deflated by vulgar usage” (24) explaining that Shamela enacts “vartue” as opposed to “virtue,” defining her own hypocritical actions with a mispronunciation. Humorously, Fielding alludes to this when Shamela meditates, “O what a charming Word that is, rest his Soul who first invented it” (*Sh.* 257)—Shamela has invented vartue through her own actions. Her use of the term “vartue” is linked to another important term though: “pretend.” In the text, we see Shamela use the word “pretend” specifically—she “pretended to tremble” in the presence of Mr. Booby for example (*Sh.* 261)—and her use of the term is a part of the sham played out linguistically and structurally. Also in *Natural Masques* Campbell refers to the sort of acting Shamela practices as “feminine theatrics” that result in and are defined by the “betrayal of the space of interior feeling associated with femininity by a counterfeit or ‘sham’ exterior version of it, fabricated for its effects in the public world of the male”(25). It is just this process Fielding illuminates in his parody as Shamela alters her outward representation according to the situation such as when she writes to her mother that she cleverly “pretended to be shy” when the Squire took her by the hand and that she only “pretended to be Angry” when he kissed her (243).

Shamela very consciously and carefully crafts her public presentation of herself in accordance with each of her intended audiences. For instance, on apprehending a meeting with Williams, Shamela describes in her letters how she arranged her clothing to “shew as much as [she] could of [her] Bosom,” then “practiced over all [her] Airs before the Glass” (255). On the other hand, when Shamela encounters Mr. Booby, we see her pretend to be shy and modest when he addresses her and angry when he kisses her (Fielding 243). These “feminine theatrics” illustrate the mutability of outward representations, and, as we might expect, justify Fielding’s

warning in the "Essay" that those individuals who at first appear to be saints in turn be looked upon suspiciously. In regards to such people, Fielding cautions that "Ninety Nine Times in a Hundred" the appearance of saintliness is a counterfeit, or as we might better say, a sham (Essay 207). Shamela's changeability—her theatricality—provides an important illustration of the danger that leads Fielding to make the extreme conclusion that "one real Saint should suffer a little unjust Suspicion, than Ninety Nine Villains should impose on the World, and be enabled to perpetrate their Villainies under this Mask" (Essay 207). Therein, the ability of an individual to manipulate her or his own outward representation is ultimately dangerous for Fielding because it threatens the viability of measuring character by behavior and interferes with his project that seeks to illuminate hypocrisy in society.

Of course, we also see Parson Williams alter the public presentation of his character just as Shamela does. For instance, we presume based on the behaviors illuminated in *Shamela* that when Williams gives sermons he pretends to be pious, even though he spends his evenings with Shamela "in Pleasures, which tho' not strictly innocent" will be "purged away by frequent and sincere Repentance" (253). Again, Williams' actions are signaled by his abuse of language in his interpretation of scripture and of Methodist doctrine, specifically Methodist theology as articulated in such early sermons as *Free Grace* (1739), in which Wesley argues that damnation is not finitely determined, and may be renounced upon sincere repentance. In that sermon, Wesley actually argues against predestination on the basis that God would then be "unchangeable" (*Free Grace* 8). It is this rhetoric of change that is problematic for Wesley, and we see those negative effects in Fielding's fear of Shamela's ability to change her representation. Wesley wants to see God as compassionate and loving, and the belief that God is willing to allow

individuals to redeem themselves, rewarding faith with grace, is consistent with that perspective, though dangerous to the logic of Fielding's method of interpreting character, which requires behaviors to be predictable and, therefore, able to be systematized. Fielding's examples in *Shamela* suggest that changeability in humans is negative because it appears to be an effort to hide the truth by rendering behavior useless through its inconsistency. As such, it is changeability, which forms the logical basis of the doctrine assurance and the Methodist conversion experience, that allows Parson Williams to manipulate Methodist doctrine so that he can carry out his multiple roles—the rake with Shamela and the man of God to his parishioners. In Williams' belief that he can reverse the sins he commits with Shamela through "frequent and sincere repentance," he asserts his power of changeability as Shamela does, except that his hypocrisy is facilitated specifically by his interpretation of Methodist doctrine.

The "feminine theatrics" that expose Shamela's character for Fielding and Parson Williams' abuse of religion are clearly self-serving, and it is such ends that we find that he opposes. In the "Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men," the connections between character and theatricality are cemented when in the "Essay" Fielding says of hypocrisy that it makes "the whole World…a vast Masquerade" (184) where "Disguises…are worn on the greater Stage" (185) in order to take advantage of those unable to discern true interior moral character. For Fielding, theatricality is the most appropriate way to articulate hypocrisy. Fielding, as a dramatist, found value in the theater—he did after all turn to the novel partly due to the prohibitions of the Licensing Act of 1737—but in the prose fiction, it is important that he seems to insinuate that there is "good" theatricality and "bad" theatricality. By describing what hypocrisy entails metaphorically in the phrase "Disguises…worn on the greater Stage," Fielding

implies that hypocrisy constitutes "bad" theatricality because it overreaches the traditional boundaries of the stage; in other words, with no end to the play, the disguises become permanent and disguise becomes identity.

For an example of "good" versus "bad" theatricality, we can look to the very first reference to Methodism in which Shamela's mother prescribes Whitefield's sermons to her daughter. According to Albert Lyles' reading in *Methodism Mocked* of satire directed at the person of George Whitefield, Wesley's Calvinist counterpart, "A habit of self-exhibition has placed him in the public eye where he indulges in every theatrical trick, even confession of his immoralities, in order to keep attention" (138). The Methodists, because of their evangelical worship style, appeared to more conservative Anglicans to be drawing worshipers into their meetings by entertaining them first and foremost, making people like Fielding skeptical of the purposes of Methodist leaders. In particular, Whitefield more than Wesley was known for his animated sermonizing, and for Fielding, a reference to Whitefield is a reference to theatricality because Whitefield exemplifies a type of "bad" theatricality that gains its force from its use beyond the traditional bounds of the established church in terms of both physical location (meetinghouses and public spaces) and audience (often a varied assortment of members of the working class). The "theatrical trick[s]" Lyles attributes to Whitefield are motivated not by an actor's desire to entertain or represent an idea truthfully, but instead are motivated by what was believed to be Whitefield's desire to convert followers so as to amass recognition for himself. So, while society here is merely a performance and a "greater Stage," Fielding clearly believes that disguises (such as Whitefield's theatricality or enthusiasm) should not be used on it.

**Altering the Representation of Methodists: Melodrama to Discourse**

In the series of letters written by Parsons Tickletext and Oliver that frame the body of the "Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews," Parson Tickletext writes to his friend Parson Oliver recommending Richardson's novel *Pamela* as an exemplar of virtue, as did many members of the clergy. However, Tickletext, as Fielding would have it, misreads the theology of *Pamela* and the dangerous implications of its Methodist overtones when he praises the "useful and truly religious Doctrine of Grace" that plays a central role in Richardson's text. He claims that only the "coldest Zealot cannot read [*Pamela*] without Emotion," (*Sh.* 236) and that even as he writes this he can "feel an Emotion" (*Sh.* 237). Especially considering that Pamela herself, "at this Instant, with all the Pride of Ornament cast off" (*Sh.* 237), excites Tickletext in a voyeuristic and pornographic sense akin to Williams' lustful excitement, we see that Fielding's negative conception of emotion merges lust and religious enthusiasm. In addition, the name "Tickletext" carries many meanings that embody both types of emotion—lust and enthusiasm: its obscure usage as a term for "parson," its reference to "tickling," or manipulating a text, and its allusion to "excitement or pleasant stimulation"(notes in *Sh.* 235). Therefore, by using the name "Tickletext," Fielding conflates evangelical emotion with the sexuality and lust that is alluded to through Tickletext's voyeurism. Together, the three references draw together religion and sexuality, which allows Fielding to use sexuality as a way to explore religion, which in this case is particularly limited to Methodism.

By circulating the text of *Shamela* among the public, Oliver provides a means by which individuals can make informed choices about the moral examples to which they look, not unlike the intended goal of the "Essay" to "arm [the innocent and undesigning] against Imposition"

(specifically, hypocrisy). Fielding's chief fear is misrepresentation, and that books like *Pamela* and the words of men like Parson Williams will be accepted without further consideration. For Fielding and for us as *Shamela*'s audience, the text is a parody, but for Parson Oliver the text is supplemental reading that provides the necessary support or contradiction to verify the truth of the story. Whereas Tickletext privileges the validity of individual knowledge and testimony, Parson Oliver insists on the necessity of establishing supporting evidence and checking facts. In Parson Oliver's reference to Shamela's letters as the "Antidote to this Poison [*Pamela*]" and in Tickletext's eagerness to publish those "authentick Copies" (*Sh*. 275), we read Fielding's demand for the protective power of evidence that is so thoroughly exemplified in the "Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men." It is for this reason then, as well as Fielding's evident disdain for Methodism due largely to the complications it creates for character assessment, that the alternative reading—*Shamela*'s ability to be corrective through laughter—is only a secondary effect. In the end, Tickletext exemplifies a naïve rather than hypocritical Methodist because he is only misguided and, therefore, can be converted away from his method of interpreting character, and thus from Methodism itself. Differentiated from Parson Williams and educated by Parson Oliver, Tickletext operates in the text as a warning to readers who need to be schooled in critical reading practices that will help them identify hypocrisy.

Fielding's critique of the naïve way that Tickletext reads shifts the focus of the narrative onto a Methodist character so that the effect of one individual's hypocrisy on society can be examined. From the title page we immediately see how Fielding is addressing his parody of Richardson's text, first "expos[ing] and refut[ing]"the "Misrepresentations of a Book called *Pamela*," "Together with A full Account of all that passed between her and Parson Arthur

Williams." Fielding's objective in crafting his revision as stated here is thus twofold: expose Pamela's true character, and emphasize Parson Williams' role in the narrative in relation to Pamela. Through Williams, Fielding illustrates Shamela's immorality, and though Shamela is never directly implicated as a Methodist herself, the morality of the two characters is intertwined so that Methodism serves as one of two significant markers of the hidden dangers within Richardson's *Pamela*. The other marker, the epistolary form itself, is not unrelated because it, as a confessional mode, proposes that individual testimony can be taken as truth.

So while both Tickletext and Williams together exemplify the meanings embodied by the name "Tickletext," there is something particularly malevolent about Williams' embodiment of the allusions. For example, Williams "tickles" Biblical text on numerous occasions as a means to satisfying his lust for Shamela. The crucial difference then is that Tickletext only embodies a potential malignancy: while Williams is sexually excited by Shamela the person, Tickletext is excited only by the fictional character Pamela. This potential malignancy personifies Fielding's greatest fear in the figure of Parson Tickletext: an impressionable, unquestioning innocent who accepts as truth what he reads. In fact, in the "Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men," Fielding declares his audience to be just the sort of person Tickletext represents here when he hopes that "this Essay may perhaps be of some Use to the more open and honest and considering Part of Mankind, who, either from Ignorance or Inattention, are daily exposed to all the pernicious Designs of that detestable Fiend, Hypocrisy" (186). For Fielding, Williams then is important not only because he is a hypocrite, but also because his hypocrisy is the mechanism that enables his influence.

Again, the distinction between Tickletext and Williams is that Tickletext's admiration of the doctrine of grace and of Parson Williams in Richardson's novel is due to his naïveté, not to selfish motivations. In *Shamela* Parson Oliver serves as Parson Tickletext's mentor, filling a protective role similar to Fielding's own in "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men," by correcting Tickletext's initial judgment of *Pamela*. In Parson Oliver's correction of Tickletext we hear Fielding's voice and an echo of the "Essay," especially when he asks if clergymen like Tickletext could "think the Cause of Religion, or Morality, can want such slender Support?"(*Sh.* 238-9). Oliver's concern for evidence reflects Fielding's concern with support and evidence in the "Essay" as he examines the efficacy of physiognomy and behavior in the interpretation of moral character. Here, the text of *Shamela* serves the same purpose of the "Essay" and at the same time is itself the evidence the "Essay" demands. Oliver, after all, hopes that Tickletext will circulate the text so that others might not be endangered by the moral values Richardson presents in his novel and by what Tickletext reads as a positive endorsement of Methodism (*Sh.* 240).

With the contrast between Tickletext and Williams exposing the dangers of hypocrisy in two different ways, *Shamela* becomes an exemplar of what an epistolary novel would look like if individuals' characters were accurately and truthfully interpreted and represented by their behaviors. To carry out this experiment, Fielding implies that the epistolary form itself becomes a part of Pamela's outward appearance and representation of herself. As Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook points out in *Epistolary Bodies*, during the eighteenth century the letter "became an emblem of the private…while keeping its actual function as an agent of the public exchange of knowledge" (6). *Shamela* exemplifies this paradoxical function so that when Fielding's parody

seems to rely upon the authenticity of the letters, it also relies upon Parson Oliver putting them into circulation by sending them to Parson Tickletext. While Fielding mocks the ability of Richardson's novel to provide any insight into interior moral character through both the purpose and the accuracy of the letters, he argues that the authentic letters have the power to help individuals accurately assess moral character and protect themselves from being victimized. However, Fielding knows what most individuals do not and reads Pamela's letters critically; rather than taking them at first glance to be representative of her virtue, he looks between the lines for the truth behind the story and, in this case, the authentic letters Parson Oliver possesses and hopes to circulate. In *Shamela* he shows what it would look like to lift the curtain and expose the truth in the story as a warning to readers who would be too naïve to see hypocrisy for themselves.

### *Joseph Andrews* and Satire in Discourse

In a continued effort to deal with the complexity of the relationship between character, theatricality, and hypocrisy (that was perhaps even exacerbated by *Shamela*), Fielding strategically follows his parody with his first comic novel, *Joseph Andrews*. Whereas Methodism in *Shamela* is a large part of characterization and is embedded within the novel's plot structures, Methodism in *Joseph Andrews* is the subject of discourse. In contrast to *Shamela*, Fielding's approach in this first attempt at the novel is articulated as an intellectual endeavor first and foremost. As such, *Joseph Andrews*, like *Tom Jones*, is what Fielding calls in his preface to *Joseph Andrews* a "comic epic-poem in prose" (*JA* 25), thereby situating it as a transitional novel

in which the theatricality of *Shamela* is moderated into a more comprehensive, didactic study of moral character that favors discourse over melodramatic burlesque.

In the famous preface to *Joseph Andrews* Fielding explains how he makes this important transition first by defining "burlesque" in contrast to the "comic-epic poem in prose," and then by defining hypocrisy within that context within reference to both narrative styles. Of the burlesque he says, it is "the exhibition of what is monstrous and unnatural, and where our delight, if we examine it, arises from the surprising absurdity, as in appropriating the manners of the highest to the lowest" (*JA* 26). After essentially categorizing *Shamela* as just such a burlesque through the definition he presents, Fielding's preface asserts that the burlesque style—and its melodrama—complicates, rather than illuminates, the possibility for the method by which to assess character that is the subject of the later "Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men." As Fielding describes, "what caricature is in painting, burlesque is in writing" (*JA* 27) and by using his friend Hogarth as an example, Fielding explains that Hogarth's work is not burlesque because he is able "to express the affections of men on canvas," rather than simply "paint a man with a nose, or any other feature of a preposterous size, or to expose him in some absurd or monstrous attitude" (*JA* 27). In the process of explaining this difference, however, Fielding redefines the very term "ridiculous," and while the casual use of caricature denotes that which is general or generic form of ridiculousness, Fielding claims that it is actually "the monstrous that is much easier to paint than describe, and the ridiculous to describe than paint" (*JA* 27). Therefore, what Hogarth accomplishes is what is actually the extreme difficulty of painting this new conception of the ridiculous, which in Fielding's terms reveals affectation, "the only source of the true ridiculous" (*JA* 28). Fielding changes the course of his prose writing,

abandoning the "bad" or hollow, burlesque theatricality of *Shamela* in an effort to replicate Hogarth's ability to capture the duplicity in real life that is affectation in the form of hypocrisy; while parody only captures the monstrous and absurd, it is the comic-epic in prose that is able to "express the affections of men." It is in this move from expressing the burlesque ridiculous to expressing the ridiculous as affectation that Fielding begins to alter and qualify his own ideas about character. By equating caricature and burlesque, Fielding provides an explanation of his move toward the didacticism of the "Essay" and both *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* and away from the inadequateness of appearance (countenance) to dictate judgments of interior moral character. Later, in the 1743 "Essay," Fielding comes to the exact same conclusion, discounting appearance because it is "liable to some Incertainty," while praising the observation of behavior as "abundantly sufficient to secure us" (226).

In the text of *Joseph Andrews* this shift from a burlesque representation of theatrical duplicity to the representation of affectation is facilitated by one of Fielding's most developed and philosophical discourses on Methodism. In Chapter 17, Fielding critically considers the interior motivations of the Methodist leadership when the Parsons Adams and Barnabas discuss the nature of sermons (specifically Whitefield's and Wesley's) with a bookseller. As Parson Adams seeks to sell his sermons so that they may be published, Fielding provides the reader with a lively discussion of publication, theater, and, of course, religion. The bookseller initially states, "sermons are mere drugs," and that "the trade is so vastly stocked with them, that really unless they come out with the name of Whitfield or Westley" he is not interested (*JA* 92), yet he offers to take the sermons to town to find someone to publish them, and he ensures their safety by claiming that even the most popular play would be safe in his possession (*JA* 92). Adams is

suspicious of the bookseller (and rightly so), but the detail that alarms him is significant: "He was sorry to hear sermons compared to plays" (*JA* 92). Here Albert Lyles' insight into the connection between Whitefield and theatricality—sermons and plays—is useful and can elucidate the anxieties surrounding Methodism that Fielding was internalizing. For instance, the extemporaneous style of preaching practiced by Methodist clergy was in many ways like "a dramatic performance with the drama heightened by highly emotional language and direct appeals to the audience" (Lyles 73), while traditional Anglican sermons were read and delivered "with little show of emotion" (Lyles 73). Generally, satires of Methodism take aim at sermons in their spoken form as Lyles suggests, but by encountering them through the perspective of publication, Fielding strikes at the venal motives for publication and the commercial success of the Methodist ventures. In this scene from *Joseph Andrews*, the printed sermons of Whitefield and Wesley are equated with plays as highly profitable commodities, which could imply that they share similar generic qualities. The following assumption then is that the theatricality that makes the spoken Methodist sermon powerful is transferred to the written version, just as a play would sell successfully both in quarto as well as in performance. Similar to the way that Fielding links theatricality, hypocrisy, and Methodism in *Shamela* through Williams' stereotypical depiction and through the caricature of Shamela, in *Joseph Andrews* he makes the connection not only through discourse, but also through the documents that contain that discourse.

Fielding's connections between Methodism, the literary market, and theater in *Joseph Andrews* are in the first sense his more superficial uses of Methodism, particularly the marketability of its many print products in the media culture of the eighteenth-century. But by

alluding to the plays and theater in terms of the marketplace, Fielding draws the discussion back to ground he made familiar in *Shamela*, but without the elements of parody and burlesque. Interestingly, the discussion does not juxtapose the Methodist and the anti-Methodist, but rather two variations of the anti-Methodist; both Barnabas and Adams respond to the bookseller on the issue of Whitefield's popularity by describing Methodists as mischief-makers. Barnabas rejects Whitefield only on the grounds of his enthusiasm in that he "pretends to understand the scripture literally" and "would insinuate to the people, that a clergyman ought to be always preaching and praying" (*JA* 93). Barnabas is reductive as anti-Methodists often are, and while Adams does not support Whitefield, it is important that we do see Adams qualifying his statements in a way that does not reflect the more stereotypical responses to Methodism that Barnabas represents. Parson Adams restates Barnabas' observation in a more logical vein, asserting that the problem with Whitefield rests not in his fundamental critiques of the Church of England, but instead in his method of critique, which he agrees is Whitefield's enthusiasm and what he understands as the Methodist "doctrine of faith against good works" (*JA* 93). Adams' approach reflects Fielding's own attitude toward Methodism in which Fielding actually shared with Whitefield, according to Martin Battestin in *The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art*, the "desire to return the priesthood to the ideals of primitive Christianity" (153). From this point of concession, Fielding bases his disagreement on the doctrine of faith, which he believed rooted Christian charity in "mercenary generosity" based on "knowledge or profession" instead of in "a good-natured, disinterested compassion" (*JA* 98). Christian charity according to Fielding's understanding requires good works, but Methodism does not, and based on "knowledge or profession" (faith), appears to render good works theologically unnecessary. Charity, it seems, does not imply action for the

Methodist, and it is this implication that Fielding takes up in *Tom Jones,* making the case that good works are necessary in the assessment of moral character as well as to Christian morality.

Once again, Fielding's anxiety over the recognition of and dangers created by hypocrisy is filtered through Methodism with the personage of Whitefield as its vehicle. Adams believes that Whitefield is not just vain but actually hypocritical saying, "none but the Devil himself could have the confidence to preach [the doctrine of faith against good works]" (*JA* 93). This deduction that Whitefield uses religion to trick people, just like the Devil, is significant because it becomes more relevant to individuals as a critique of Methodism that is couched in a conversation in which they become part of the discourse, rather than in melodramatic, theatrical burlesque that they merely observe. This allows Fielding to specifically target the place where his project to expose moral character intersects with and is complicated by Methodism: the doctrine of assurance and the resulting privilege of faith over works. With the reader engaged in the conversation, what was widely perceived as Methodism's "serious dangers to the welfare of religion in England" (Lyles 25) has the potential to be ameliorated, possibly through a method like that presented in "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men."

As the stereotypical satire of the mid-1700s attests, some people believed full-heartedly that the two leaders of the Methodist movement were agents of the Devil himself, but Fielding's use of Methodism is more complex and substantive than other contemporary references because he raises questions about character representation alongside the satiric and discursive treatments. For example, when Adams insinuates that Whitefield is the Devil (*JA* 93), Fielding has already provided a more expansive context for that assertion than simply labeling as we see in his focus on the doctrine of assurance in *Shamela*.

Again, in the preface, he makes distinctions in his terminology that are important to the role Methodism plays. One such distinction is between two types of duplicity: vanity and hypocrisy. For Fielding, vanity is "affecting false characters, in order to purchase applause," while hypocrisy "sets us on an endeavor to avoid censure by concealing our vices under an appearance of their opposite virtues" (*JA* 28). By these definitions, it does not appear altogether clear whether or not Fielding believed Wesley and Whitefield were hypocrites in the most menacing sense of the word, but his project of developing an accurate means of interpreting moral character does benefit by using Methodism as a "foil to set off the practical advantages of the benevolist ethic to society" (Battestin 84). It seems likely that Fielding may have agreed that the two men were simply vain and egotistical, especially if Fielding's foremost concern with the state of religion in England was the "prevalent contempt of the clergy" (Battestin 130), which was, of course, supported by many of the vices of which Methodist clergy might stand accused: "luxury, pluralism, selfishness, pride, bigotry, sycophancy, and ignorance" (Battestin 137). It is also possible then that doctrines like grace and assurance and practices such as frequent worship meetings espoused not hypocrisy, but rather vanity—the vanity of people who know in their hearts they can be saved by God's grace. Whether primarily rooted in vanity or in hypocrisy, the doctrine of assurance is problematic for Fielding either because it enables hypocrites to profit from their behavior by rendering works unimportant and absolving them from responsibility, or because it enables vanity, which is equally dangerous because it disregards one individual's effect on another within society.

Consequently, Fielding's contribution to the immense volume of writing satirizing Methodism is that he makes an effort to draw distinctions between individuals where others

merely generalize, and to form arguments based on fact and reason where others appeal only to readers' emotions. In other words, Fielding provides an opportunity to resolve the problems surrounding the Methodist movement by illustrating that they are part of a bigger problem: the difficulty of assessing moral character in society. While *Shamela*'s Parson Williams is a stereotypical representation of a Methodist, against the patterns of convention Fielding frames him with an alternative: Parson Tickletext, a Methodist who might be swayed by reason. Fittingly, the framing correspondence between Parsons Tickletext and Oliver that is meant to instruct the reader as much as Tickletext encompasses discourse very similar to that in *Joseph Andrews*. In *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding does not present a Methodist character at all, but rather juxtaposes two different versions of the anti-Methodist: while Barnabas denounces the movement for reasons of personal preference that reveal his laziness, Adams rejects it on the grounds of its doctrine just like Fielding. In each of these instances, Fielding grounds his satire in logic as opposed to emotion, restraining the context of his rejection of Methodism to religion and its effect on society. In turn, this provides an arena in which the argument against Methodism reveals a larger issue involving morality that is reflected didactically in the later "Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men," in which Fielding expounds on the danger of hypocrisy and ruminates on our frighteningly limited abilities to recognize it in society.

While the conventional tendency is to label the Methodist as a liar and a fraud as we see Fielding do through the actions of Williams in *Shamela* and in the framing of the problem with Methodists by Barnabas in *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding's insistence on complicating that over-generalized description with characters such as Tickletext and Adams humanizes the Methodist, which in turn, suggests that the Methodist can be reformed. With the acknowledgement of this

possibility through Fielding's reframing of the Methodist issue, he also acknowledges that the danger of hypocrisy can be overcome, though he does not provide a solution at this point. In *Tom Jones* Fielding continues to base his satire of Methodism on issues of doctrine, turning to conversation rather than representation and drawing upon the burlesque depictions of conventional satires only tangentially. Additionally, from *Tom Jones* forward Fielding's solution to the problem of assessing character as explicated in "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men" provides a direct link between the Methodist problem and the greater issue that encompasses it. As Fielding's satire of Methodism becomes more complex, his use of Methodism becomes as revolutionary as the novels themselves.

# Chapter 2
## *Tom Jones*: Faith, Good Works, and Interpreting Moral Character

In Fielding's dedication to his friend George Lyttelton in *Tom Jones* he sets out the purpose of the novel: "to recommend 'the Cause of Religion and Virtue'" (*TJ* xix). Both virtue and religion play a significant role in the previous novels, *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews*, as Fielding establishes the dangers presented by hypocrites and the subsequent need for a method by which to recognize them. In *Tom Jones*, Fielding tests one such method, and in doing so, illustrates the role religion can potentially play in our ability to make those distinctions. Within a fictional world, Fielding explores the viability of actions to communicate moral character, which he recommends in the conclusion of "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men." To test the viability of judging character on the basis of observable actions, Fielding works out what it means to be virtuous within the boundaries of a religious philosophy that privileges good works as much as Methodism privileges faith. This philosophy—Latitudinarianism—envisioned what Martin Battestin describes in *The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art* as a religion of "practical morality by which a sincere man might earn his salvation through the exercise of benevolence" (15). In other words, Latitudinarianism, by placing an emphasis on the performance of good works, attempts to provide a path to salvation that is easy to understand, easy to follow, and seemingly effective; as a religious philosophy then, it is "practical" rather than mystical. This practicality of privileging actions over faith in religious philosophy extends beyond religion and also has important applications for the interpretation of moral character is addressed through the juxtaposition of Latitudinarianism and the satiric representations of Methodism. By drawing upon Latitudinarianism throughout *Tom Jones*, Fielding provides a contrast to the pervasive satiric representations of Methodism.

Both the Latitudinarians and the Methodists sought to establish a doctrine and practice that is optimistic about the potential of human nature and God's willingness to reward goodness. The juxtaposition then is not of orthodoxy and heterodoxy, but instead, it is a juxtaposition between two different philosophies of Anglican practice; John Wesley, after all, maintained an allegiance to the Church of England through most of his lifetime. However, it is only Latitudinarianism that has the power to clearly distinguish true morality from the mere appearance of it because, for Fielding, religious practices function also as systems of interpretation. In *Tom Jones*, the morality of characters aligns with the divisions between Latitudinarianism and Methodism, good works and faith, with the "good natured hero" aligned with Latitudinarianism through the purity of his actions and Methodism represented by his various antagonists. *Tom Jones* recommends charity, not only because it is morally right according to Christianity, but also because it is a viable way to discern who is a hypocrite.

**Fielding's Morality in *Tom Jones***

Fielding's depiction of morality in *Tom Jones* is neither orthodox nor unobjectionable by most moral standards as is seen in both the dedication and the first chapter of Book I in which Fielding spends a great deal of time and energy defending the subject matter of the novel. In particular, his presentation of the introduction as a "Bill of Fare to the Feast" in the title of the first chapter of Book I (*TJ* 31) is relevant to the claims about morality he makes through the juxtaposition of Tom and Blifil. As Fielding explains, such a "Bill of Fare" is to be found at a public ordinary, which indicates that the subject matter will reflect the tastes of common working people, rather than aristocratic expectations of moderation and refinement. Throughout the

novel, many of Tom's actions, such as his rustic cavorting with Molly Seagrim and his sordid affair with Lady Bellaston, illustrate this lack of refinement. Even so, as Ronald Paulson explains in *Satire and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England*, it is Tom who illustrates Fielding's belief that, in some cases, "though an action directed by a good motive goes astray, it is nevertheless a good action" (133). Even though Tom has numerous moral lapses in the course of the novel, his offences are motivated by his good-natured reluctance to disappoint people, which is at heart an honorable motivation itself. Later, as Fielding begins to unravel important connections between charity, character, and stereotypes of Methodism, it is this controversial understanding of Tom's moral character—in spite of his frequent lapses—that he expresses through the contrast of good works and faith that is encompassed by the juxtaposition of Methodism and Latitudinarianism.

Fielding's clarity in setting forth his intentions here and in countering potential objections "that this Dish is too common and vulgar" illustrates first, his awareness of the counterintuitive nature of the claim that a degree of baseness can be moral, and second, the honesty with which he is setting forth those claims (*TJ* 32). Unlike in *Shamela*, a farcical parody, and *Joseph Andrews*, a comic-epic in prose in which religion remains a secondary concern, *Tom Jones* is the novel in which Fielding gives priority to religion, therein establishing his own functioning definition and exemplification of Christian morality. Yet, the novel is an entertainment as well as an explication of a moral philosophy, and Fielding explains his strategy for producing the dual-purpose piece, pointing out that "the Excellence of the mental Entertainment consists less in the Subject, than in the Author's Skill in well dressing it up" (*TJ* 33). In turn, the combination of entertainment and didacticism complicates the articulation of Fielding's concern for the

interpretation of character and evasion of hypocrisy in *Tom Jones*. Always the dramatist, Fielding's compulsion for "dressing it up" can be seen in the layers of division he builds between forms of Anglican practice, good works and faith, and the characters themselves. However, with the various differences represented by the characters, good works help to distinguish good people from hypocrites by providing visible markers of moral character. Tom and Blifil, as protagonist and antagonist, exemplify within the forms of the fictional narrative the satirical interpretation of the theological debate between the two dissenting sects and in doing so exemplify the contrast between good moral character and hypocrisy. In turn, Tom represents Latitudinarianism through his generosity and purity of motive, which contrasts Blifil who represents Methodist stereotype through his avarice and egocentricity.

Although Methodism comes to be used as a marker of immorality by Fielding, the important difference in *Tom Jones* from *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews* is that Methodist allusions are embedded further into the fabric of the plot so that we can imagine the Methodist characters functioning in the novel without the epithet "Methodist." By correlating Methodism with the Blifils and Latitudinarianism with the Allworthys, Methodism and Latitudinarianism become potential keys to the interpretation of moral character for Fielding. Latitudinarianism, with its emphasis on works rather than faith alone, becomes the exemplary tool to interpretation for Fielding because, as Ronald Paulson argues in *Satire and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England*, "Fielding shows less interest in his commentators as attitudes or points of view than simply as devices for establishing the objective meaning of an action" (84-85). In other words, Fielding uses Latitudinarianism primarily because it is practical and provides a solution to the difficulty of interpreting moral character, not just because it is a superior religious philosophy.

As such, Methodism and Latitudinarianism each take on new functions that, while related to their doctrines, function independently of them for Fielding.

**Establishing the Divisions**

The plot's dichotomy between the novel's protagonist and antagonist, Tom and Allworthy's nephew Blifil, begins long before either character enters the story and before there is any substantive religious discourse. Fielding first tells us that a man by the name of Doctor Blifil frequently visited Mr. Allworthy's house, and that a "great Appearance of Religion" was one of his best attributes (*TJ* 61). Immediately, the reader understands both the narrator's coyness in calling the "Appearance" of religion the Doctor's only commendable characteristic, and his mock humility when he "would not presume to say" whether or not Doctor Blifil's "religion is real" (*TJ* 61). These disavowals, of course, are meant to be humorous. The tone and diction indicate that Fielding is expressing his own distrust of public representation through a narrator who promotes a view with which he disagrees. In disagreeing, the narrator appears foolish, and Fielding's point regarding the Doctor's hypocrisy is reinforced by the readers' laughter at the narrator's expense. Effectively, this use of the narrator deflects Fielding's judgment of hypocrites like Blifil onto an implicit, harmless judgment of the narrator, or rather, back onto himself.

In addition, as Fielding creates humor through the narrator's description of Doctor Blifil, he also draws upon stereotypical representations of Methodism in order to imply that the Doctor is a Methodist because to have only an "appearance" of religion is indicative of hypocrisy. As Albert Lyles illustrates in his study of eighteenth-century satires of Methodism, *Methodism Mocked*, the charge of hypocrisy underlies nearly every argument against Methodism made in

the satiric responses to it, especially in the performative articulation of enthusiasm and in conversions. Moreover, Fielding's use of the word "appearance" not only suggests that there is a discrepancy between surfaces and interiors, but also twists its meaning in a way that echoes the manipulation of words by the blatant Methodist hypocrite Parson Williams in *Shamela*. After implying in this manner that Doctor Blifil is a hypocrite, Fielding, manipulating the narrator as a puppet-master manipulates a puppet, immediately pretends to backpedal once again, making the claim that he cannot be certain of Doctor Blifil's religious intentions because he is "not possessed of any Touch-stone, which can distinguish the true from the false" (*TJ* 61). However, we know from "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men" that Fielding does believe that there are touchstones—that there are ways to distinguish truth from hypocrisy. In fact, after asserting that "the Actions of Men seem to be the justest Interpreters of their Thoughts" (Essay 197), Fielding spends the entirety of the essay explaining in minute detail exactly how men's actions can be used to accurately assess moral character, even in light of the dangers presented by deception and hypocrisy.

When a mutual attraction between Bridget and Doctor Blifil arises, the narrator takes the opportunity to present a more damning commentary to support the earlier suggestions of Doctor Blifil's hypocrisy made through coy accusation. As the narrator tells us in this further commentary, Doctor Blifil wishes he could marry Bridget and "lament[s]" it as "an unfortunate Accident" that he is already married—and that Mr. Allworthy is aware of it (*TJ* 62). What he laments, of course, is not the impossibility of fulfilling love, but the dowry Bridget would bring to a marriage; his venal motives are implied by the way in which he quickly passes off Bridget to his brother, Captain Blifil. However, the Doctor "certainly had no great Friendship for his

Brother," and so his suggestion that Captain Blifil woo Bridget because of her wealth further reduces Bridget to a commodity. Finally, Doctor Blifil's question, "Or is there a Pleasure in being accessary to a Theft when we cannot commit it ourselves?" confirms his immorality and hypocrisy (*TJ* 64). This time, Doctor Blifil's own diction illustrates his conscious reduction of Bridget to an object of monetary value. Earlier, however, the relationship between the Doctor and Bridget is explained by the narrator's claim that love arises more quickly between "those of a religious Kind" than between others (*TJ* 62). With Doctor Blifil's attraction to Bridget founded on her valuable dowry, this earlier suggestion that religion kindled their attraction for one another becomes especially troubling for Fielding. Though Fielding does not explain this connection further, the combination of religion and greed as grounds for Doctor Blifil's attraction to Bridget Allworthy is almost certainly indicative of hypocrisy, especially if Fielding is referring to Methodists in particular when calls Doctor Blifil and Bridget "those of a religious Kind" (*TJ* 62).

Even so, in addition to Fielding's manipulation of the narrator's voice and the influence of stereotypical representations of Methodists, he also uses character names such as "Allworthy" to signify the moral states of characters in the same way that medieval morality plays had done. One effect of this use of names is that Fielding can articulate a judgment of his characters before he fully develops them through the juxtaposition of Latitudinarianism and Methodism. As he tells us in the "bill of fare," and in what is implied through the "sketch" of the Blifils that emphasizes their outward appearances and social positions (*TJ* 60), his characters begin more like caricatures than the rounded sort he demands in his preface to *Joseph Andrews*. By gradually developing the characters that will eventually juxtapose the hero, Fielding is able to

build the connections between Latitudinarianism and Methodism and good works and faith. Alternatively, the gradual development of characters can be understood in the terms of the "bill of fare:" we shall represent Human Nature at first to the keen Appetite of our Reader, in that more plain and simple Manner…and shall hereafter hash and ragoo it with all the high *French* and *Italian* Seasoning of Affectation and Vice" (*TJ* 34). In any case, according to "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men," actions provide evidence of hypocrisy, which is fundamentally why Fielding lets the compilation of his characters' behaviors establish their moral characters.

In the end, Fielding's decision to provide these abbreviated character depictions rather than immediately developing them is fundamental to the way in which we understand the relationship between character development and the function of Methodism in *Tom Jones*. To indicate that Doctor Blifil is actually a Methodist is not necessary because he is already tainted by the ambiguity arising from his "appearance of religion." Similarly, Captain Blifil's inclinations function in much the same way. In both cases, it is the ambiguity of each individual's beliefs, represented through their actions and through their motivations, that links them to Methodism, implicating Methodism's failure to provide a system of interpreting moral character.

Captain Blifil's whose physical attributes, social position, and religious affiliation are all components of that initial "sketch" Fielding presents (*TJ* 62-63). Of particular interest to Fielding's use of Methodism is the final paragraph of the description of Captain Blifil, which follows one paragraph of detailed physical description, as well as an explanation of his education and professional career in a following paragraph. However, the details provided in the third and

final paragraph do not depict Captain Blifil with an equal objectivity, but instead describe a controversial moment in the Captain's life that led him to religion, and perhaps Methodism specifically:

> He had purchased the Post of Lieutenant of Dragoons, and afterwards came to be a Captain; but having quarreled with his Colonel, was by his Interest obliged to sell; from which Time he had entirely rusticated himself, had betaken himself to studying the Scriptures, and was not a little suspected of an Inclination to *Methodism*. (*TJ* 63)

By including the suspicion of an "Inclination to Methodism" in the sketch of Captain Blifil's character, Fielding illustrates the role of religious affiliation, alongside physical appearance and social status, as an important part of a person's identity. However, its placement at the end of a paragraph that suggests that the Captain has a problem with authority (he quarrels with a superior officer) is equally important. As a religious affiliation, Methodism is an important part of the Captain's identity and, as its place in the final phrase of the description implies, its particular significance lies in its association with a flaw in Captain Blifil's character. The narrator only discloses to the reader that the Captain had left the military because of a "quarrel" with a superior officer, without any explanation to justify the insubordination. When this incomplete description is coupled in a cause and effect relationship with a conversion to Methodism, as it appears to be here, Methodism becomes an indicator of moral character that supports the suspicions raised by Captain Blifil's quarrel with his Colonel.

**Building on the Divisions**

Later, when Bridget Allworthy marries Captain Blifil, we see Fielding's various methods of dividing characters between those who exemplify the value of good works and those who do not coalesce. When Bridget marries, her ensuing change of name—the exchange of the surname "Allworthy" for "Blifil" which does not have the same strong descriptive power—corresponds to her move away from Squire Allworthy's household where charity is valued and into that of Captain Blifil who is a Methodist, at least nominally, and, therefore, does not value charity in the same way. While it might be tempting to explain Bridget's move from one value system to the other as coincidence because she is vain and so easily flattered, the transition is best explained in terms of the divisions Fielding establishes in the novel. As Albert Lyles discusses, satirists of the time generally assumed that "the emotions of women were more easily swayed than those of men," and "feared that women, like Eve in Paradise, were particularly subject to the temptation of Methodism" (97).

Perhaps then, Bridget's marriage to a man with an "Inclination to Methodism" is part of Fielding's commentary on the destructive effects of Methodism on society. In her attraction to Blifil, Bridget is lured away from people who value good works, which Fielding believes are necessary for a functioning society because they fulfill Christian responsibility as well as play a vital role in recognizing and exposing hypocrites. So, as in the satires Lyles cites, when Bridget marries Blifil, she fills the role of Eve while Blifil fills the role of the tempter, especially when we remember that Captain Blifil was enticed to Mr. Allworthy's home for the express purpose of wooing Bridget so that he might lay claim to her wealth by marrying her (*TJ* 62). Therefore, in Bridget's marriage, Fielding is able to exploit the divisions he establishes between

Latitudinarianism and Methodism to portray Methodism's privileging of faith instead of good works, which complicates his system of interpreting moral character.

Fundamentally, the satiric tradition Fielding employs here highlights the way in which Methodists were considered to take advantage of people's ignorance, just as Captain Blifil only courts Bridget because he will financially benefit from the marriage, taking advantage of her particular weaknesses: her vanity and her spinsterhood. Through Blifil's egocentricity, Fielding supports the initial privilege he ascribes religion as a part of the "sketch" of both Doctor and Captain Blifil; religious affiliation is a part of the character sketch because, in this case, it represents selfishness and self-aggrandizement. Later, this becomes even clearer when, in a supremely ironic moment, Bridget and Captain Blifil go so far as to claim that Tom does not deserve Allworthy's charity because he is orphaned and illegitimate, and due to that fact, damned—a claim that hinges on an extreme Calvinist-"Methodist" understanding of salvation and good works that posits that illegitimate children are damned and cannot be redeemed, making any charity they receive irrelevant to their salvation. As such, Captain Blifil's primary goal is to prevent Tom from inheriting money and property from Allworthy so that the wealth is diverted to Allworthy's nephew, his own son Blifil. This mean-spirited action not only makes Captain Blifil a villain, but importantly it does so by exposing him as a hypocrite through his argument against charity that is cloaked in religious terms echoing those of the Calvinist-Methodist doctrine George Whitefield espoused.

**Character and Christian Charity**

In the case of Captain Blifil, the appendage of Methodism to the sketch of his character identifies in the primary plot the underlying discourse between Methodism and Latitudinarianism. The contrast of Captain Blifil and Squire Allworthy becomes in the course of the novel an indirect method of illustrating the virtues of good works and their necessity to society. As Martin Battestin notes in *The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art*, Whitefield's brand of Methodism (such as Fielding criticizes) was "the perfect foil [for Fielding to use] to set off the practical advantage of the benevolist ethic to society"(84) because its "tenets of natural depravity, enthusiasm, and salvation by faith" served as "a too comfortable rationalization for self-indulgence" (83). In contrast, the charity required by the Latitudinarian doctrine provides the outward evidence of good moral character that Fielding understands as absolutely necessary in an increasingly urban and modern society that seems to demand the sort of systematized approach to human interaction that he presents in "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men."

Fielding's juxtaposition of hypocrisy and good moral character through religious philosophy continues to take shape as we learn that "Eight months after the Celebration of the Nuptials" of Captain Blifil and Bridget Allworthy, Bridget gave birth to a son who as the "Midwife discovered…was born a Month before its full Time" (*TJ* 78). Significantly, it is in the same chapter that provides this important detail, which also later serves as concrete evidence of the couple's hypocrisy, that "Religious Cautions against shewing too much Favour to Bastards" are debated (*TJ* 78). Of course, as Battestin clarifies, the common definition of "Bastard" from the time period was one "born out of Marriage"(*TJ* 79) so that technically, Blifil is not

illegitimate because his parents married before his birth, despite the fact that he was conceived prior to the marriage. Even so, the importance of the debate lies not in Captain Blifil and Bridget's deceit, but instead in the way it introduces a conversation about the value of good works in which their son benefits from Tom being denied Allworthy's charity. Bridget and Captain Blifil condemn Mr. Allworthy's treatment of Tom by quoting scripture and referring to Tom as the "Fruit[s] of sin" (*TJ* 79). While Bridget's intention is to ensure that Blifil will inherit Allworthy's estate in its entirety, rather than sharing it with Tom or worse, not inheriting at all, the way she cloaks that intention in scripture is reminiscent of Parson Williams' manipulation of scripture in *Shamela*. However, in this case, manipulating scripture does more than illustrate a dangerous effect of Methodism and frames a debate—a discourse on the value of good works—that, because the Blifils wish to disinherit Tom appears so unjust, prompts the reader to agree with Fielding that good works are important.

In the debate, Captain Blifil and Bridget, driven by their fear that their own son will not be Allworthy's only heir, use their Calvinistic, Whitefieldian understanding of Methodist doctrine to illustrate how Tom, as a foundling, is automatically sinful, and not deserving of Allworthy's charity. In quoting several verses of scripture, all out of context, such as Exodus 20:5, "He visits the Sins of the Fathers upon the Children," and a proverb quoted within Ezekiel 18:2, "the Fathers have eaten sour Grapes, and the Children's Teeth are set on edge" (*TJ* 79), Captain Blifil fulfills the Methodist stereotype of twisting text for his own advantage. The ultimate result of Captain Blifil's interpretation of this passage is that it makes it possible for his own son to inherit Allworthy's estate. Conveniently, the interpretation also absolves Captain Blifil from doing anything charitable in order to deserve that benefit. This exact possibility—

that one might believe that they can reap the rewards of Christianity without actually treating others with Christian love and mercy—is what Fielding finds problematic about Methodist theology. Here, not only is religion rendered useless in the interpretation of character and recognition of hypocrisy, but it also becomes alienated from Christian doctrine and practice, thereby serving no other purpose beyond satisfying the selfishness and greed of hypocrites such as Captain Blifil and Bridget.

Captain Blifil's greed and concern for earthly desires fits the stereotypical model of the Methodist that is represented in so many other satires, but Fielding's use goes beyond those stereotypical functions, revealing the anxiety underlying them: what is the effect of privileging faith? In a world in which good works are secondary (or worse, unimportant), would the story of the foundling Tom Jones even be possible? Later, what it means to be charitable becomes a subject of discourse between Captain Blifil and Allworthy. In Chapter V of Book II, the Captain has recently learned from Mrs. Wilkins, one of Allworthy's servants, that Mr. Partridge, the local schoolmaster, is Tom's father. In order to acquaint Mr. Allworthy with the news, Captain Blifil yet again "engaged with Mr. Allworthy in a Discourse on Charity" (*TJ* 93). Whereas the previous debate between the two men concerned only whether or not illegitimate children deserve to be the recipients of charity, in this particular discourse, the Captain specifically argues (by "tickling" the text) that Christian charity does not require actual actions and that the word "Charity, in Scripture, no where means Beneficence, or Generosity" (*TJ* 94). So once again, Captain Blifil is asserting that good works are inconsequential to the way in which people interact with one another.

Squire Allworthy counters Captain Blifil on the point of charity arguing that although he "could say nothing as to the true Sense of the Word [charity]…he had always thought it was interpreted to consist in Action, and that giving Alms constituted at least one Branch of that Virtue" (*TJ* 95). According to Martin Battestin, the general thrust of Allworthy's response here is reflected in many Latitudinarian sermons; in this instance, the specific text being referenced is likely Dr. Isaac Barrow's "The Duty and Reward of Bounty to the Poor" (qtd in *TJ* 95). So, for Allworthy, charity always consists of "action," as it does for Barrow and, as Battestin notes, Barrow states that "good-will is indeed the root of charity; but that lies under ground, and out of sight; nor can we conclude its being or life without visible fruits of beneficence" (qtd in *TJ* 95). What is important for Barrow in regards to Christian practice is important for Fielding in terms of interpreting character: the visibility of actions. Likewise, in "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men" Fielding concludes that, although actions can be countered by hypocritical pronouncements, they remain "abundantly sufficient to secure us, with proper Caution, against the subtle Devices of Hypocrisy" (227). Being able to actually see the effect of Christian morality—and true character—is imperative to both Barrow and Fielding's respective concerns, which are one and the same in the end. While Barrow asserts that there is no way to prove that people are charitable Christians without seeing them do good works for their fellow men, which is to assert just what Fielding does in the "Essay" that there is no way to prove that a person is of good moral character unless they exemplify it through 'their Behaviour to ourselves, and by their Behaviour to others" (Essay 226).

**George Whitefield, Observable Actions, and Tom Jones' Character**

Further into the novel, in Chapter VIII of Book VIII, the best example of the discourse between Methodism and the Latitudinarian valuation of good works arises when Tom meets George Whitefield's brother, here the owner of an inn called The Bell. The narrator introduces the scene by "most seriously recommend[ing] [The Bell] to every Reader who shall visit this ancient city," and then introduces its proprietor, the brother of the "great preacher Whitefield" (*TJ* 430). This hardy endorsement is, however, followed by the qualification that the proprietor is "absolutely untainted with the pernicious Principles of Methodism, or any other heretical sect" notwithstanding his familial connection to the infamous preacher (*TJ* 430).

It is in the following description of The Bell's mistress, Mrs. Whitefield, that Fielding's meaning in using the allusion begins to take shape. She too we learn is "at present as free from any methodistical Notions as her Husband," but only at present:

> she confesses that her Brother's Documents made at first some Impression upon her, and that she had put herself to the Expence of a long Hood, in order to attend the extraordinary Emotions of the Spirit; but having found during an Experiment of three Weeks, no Emotions, she says, worth a Farthing, she very wisely laid by her Hood, and abandoned the Sect. (*TJ* 431)

Mrs. Whitefield's susceptibility to the effects of Methodism characterizes Methodism as a threat of contagion as does the narrator's reference to her being "free from any methodistical Notions," even though Mrs. Whitefield does not become Methodist in any lasting way. Still, this characterization of Methodism gains some support in the depiction of Jones' arrival, in which she has difficulty in making an accurate judgment of Tom's character when behavioral evidence

is supplied. When Tom arrives at The Bell, Mrs. Whitefield notes, "her Sagacity soon discovered in the Air of our Heroe something which distinguished him from the Vulgar" (*TJ* 431). This judgment, though risky because it is based on appearances, which Fielding warns in the "Essay" are "of little Use and Credit in the World" because the observer can be so easily tricked, is correct (188). In turn, Mrs. Whitefield's initial—correct—interpretation of Tom's moral character means that either she is a skillful observer or she is lucky in her judgment.

In the end, the addition of evidence of Tom's past actions shows that Mrs. Whitefield is not a skillful observer and is simply unable to correctly read character on the basis of behavior. In the course of Tom's meal at The Bell in Chapter VIII, he meets Mr. Dowling, the lawyer who brought the news of Bridget's death to Mr. Allworthy, as well as a petty-fogger from Somersetshire who had been a guest at Mr. Allworthy's home once. The petty-fogger recognizes Tom and provides Mrs. Whitefield with his version of Tom's story, which is full of exaggerations and which disregards all of the details that explain that Jones' actions, while wrong, were all done without the intention of harming anyone. What the petty-fogger actually recounts is a horrid-sounding serious of events, including "horse-stealing" (*TJ* 432), breaking the "Arm of one Mr. Thwackum a Clergyman," snapping a "Pistol at Mr. Blifil behind his back," and the general abuse of Mr. Allworthy (*TJ* 433). Mrs. Whitefield, however, directs no questions regarding this matter to Tom himself, but rather changes her judgment of him as quickly as she first made it. Instead of judging Tom on the basis that Fielding prescribes in "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men" by observing how he acts toward herself and toward others (*TJ* 226), Mrs. Whitefield rests her judgment on hearsay, giving no or little credence to observable actions. Then, when she attempts to support that judgment in order to justify it

further, her claim is again based on the ability of appearances to provide insight into moral character. After hearing the petty-fogger's account she says, "Mr. Jones hath the most deceitful Countenance I ever saw; for sure his Looks promise something very different; and I must say, for the little I have seen of him, he is as civil a well-bred Man as you would wish to converse with" (*TJ* 433). This time, however, appearances do not lead to a correct judgment of Tom's character.

In contrast, if Mrs. Whitefield had valued good works as the Latitudinarians did, she would have placed more importance on Tom's actions at The Bell, which she acknowledges to have been perfectly agreeable. Mrs. Whitefield's inability—and seeming unwillingness—to judge Tom's moral character on the basis of his behavior in her presence shows that she does not recognize the importance of actions as evidence of moral character or even know which actions to interpret, which Fielding exploits by implicitly linking to George Whitefield and Methodism's privileging of faith over good works. Though not a Methodist in name or in practice, Mrs. Whitefield repeatedly prefers to make her own judgments of character based on appearances as if she places little value on actions in any context, social or religious. Again, Fielding is using Methodism to test the system of interpreting character that he proposes in "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men," rather than as a theology so that while Mrs. Whitefield is not actually a Methodist, the heart of the joke is that either she sometimes appears to be one through her own behavior in judging Tom without considering his behavior or she still accepts their way of interacting with people.

Fielding's use of Methodism to test a system of interpreting moral character rests on the way in which Tom's behavior to Mrs. Whitefield and to others at The Bell does not persuade her to challenge the petty-fogger's gossip. Even by placing her faith in the petty-fogger's gossip

rather than in her own observation of Tom's character, Mrs. Whitefield still does not value actions as markers of moral character in the way Fielding proposes because they are not actions she may observe. The narrator offers an explanation why she rests her judgment on the petty-fogger's claims adding, "As Mrs. Whitefield had no Reason to suspect that the Petty-fogger had any Motive or Temptation to abuse Jones….She accordingly gave up her Skill in Physiognomy" (*TJ* 434). While abandoning her practice of judging character on the basis of appearance would be advantageous according to Fielding's "Essay," Mrs. Whitefield's motivation for doing so is not because it difficult to do accurately, but instead because there is another person to make the judgment for her who she chooses to believe is a better judge than she. In this case, the danger Mrs. Whitefield succumbs to is her error of taking "the Colour of a Man's Actions not from his own visible Tendency, but from his public Character: when we believe what others say of him, in Opposition to what we see him do" (Essay 198). Her own observation of Tom's actions would support a judgment contrary to the petty-fogger's and confirm her own judgment of Tom based on his appearance, but instead, Mrs. Whitefield relies on a third party account of behavior.

Fielding is critiquing Methodism by presenting the ramifications of Methodist doctrine beyond the realm of theology, illustrating the potential danger it has on the way in which we distinguish the morally good from the morally corrupt. This scene at The Bell is not the only of its kind in the novel, but it is the most developed. In a similar scene found in Chapter IX of Book XIII, the landlady who had once hosted the liaisons between Tom and Lady Bellaston refuses on moral grounds to continue to do so once she is converted to Methodism (*TJ* 726). Here the link between faith and action is formulated a bit differently than in the previous debates pitting faith against good works. In this instance, the satire is linked to stereotype through Whitefield's name

so that we are merely meant to chuckle at the thought of a Methodist taking the moral high ground when she might benefit financially from the situation, as is implied in her refusal "on any Account" (*TJ* 726).

**Blifil's Conversion, Fielding's Conclusion**

In the rest of the novel, Fielding's allusions to Methodism become more straightforward and stereotypical, yet in the context of the previous discourses on the subject, they are no less important in their function. The final, most important example of Methodism comes at the novel's conclusion when Captain Blifil and Bridget's son (and Tom's antithesis), Blifil, infamously converts to Methodism. Albert Lyles points out in his chapter "Satire of Methodist Converts and Conversion" that Methodism was depicted by the satirists as being most appealing to the types of people who would benefit by adherence to a doctrine that appears to disregard the value of good works—people such as hypocrites, adulterers, and criminals (99). Conversion, as Lyles goes on to describe, was a "brief emotional experience" that, as the Methodist alleged, "transformed him miraculously, instantaneously, from the worst of sinners, by his own admission, to the best of Christians" (101). This "brief emotional experience," of course, is the same moment of assurance that Wesley describes in his sermon *Free Grace*, meaning once again, that the doctrine of assurance is at the root of Fielding's problem with Methodism and with the interpretation of character. In the end, Methodist doctrine, because of its seeming disavowal of good works, allows an alleged convert like the selfish, hypocritical Blifil to continue to live as he or she pleased, enjoying the benefits of appearing to be of good moral

character; in turn, exposing the hypocrite would be nearly impossible, even according to Fielding's system.

With Blifil's conversion, we see that each of the Methodist scenes underline the societal importance Fielding ties to the privileging of good works over faith alone. Of Blifil's future, all we are given is a final paragraph indicating that Squire Allworthy essentially disowned him, but that Tom and Sophia insisted on giving him a yearly sum of money (*TJ* 979)—a final charitable act that cements Tom's moral goodness, establishing the utility of good works in assessing character that gains force because Allworthy, who represents Latitudinarianism, forgives him. With his income, Blifil moves to Scotland, hopes to purchase a seat in Parliament, and as we are told, "is also lately turned Methodist, in hopes of marrying a very rich Widow of that Sect, whose Estate lies in that Part of the Kingdom" (*TJ* 980). Just like his father, Blifil too plans to seduce a woman for his own financial gain, and so the cycle appears destined to repeat itself. Through both Captain Blifil and his son, Fielding exposes why Methodism *attracts* such people. In contrast to *Shamela*, and even *Joseph Andrews* to some extent, in *Tom Jones* people are not morally corrupt because they are Methodist, but Methodist because they are morally corrupt.

Here Fielding proves the success of his own Latitudinarian perspective in interpreting character, looking at the actions of Methodists and trying to distinguish their motives. In the novel, Tom Jones is acquitted of many wrongs because of the purity of his motives, and so when Fielding presents multiple types of Methodists like the complex Mrs. Whitefield or the hypocritical Blifils, we see him dealing even-handedly with all of his characters, testing his own beliefs. For instance, in an early scene, Tom, while hunting with the gamekeeper Black George, encourages his friend to trespass onto the neighboring manor (*TJ* 120). The gentleman of that

estate, Squire Western, hears the gunshot, and discovers Tom rather than Black George who hid in the thicket. When brought before Mr. Allworthy, Tom continues to protect his friend, maintaining that he was alone because he knew that if caught, Black George would lose the job he so desperately needed in order to support his family (*TJ* 121). Yet, even though Tom is clearly guilty of trespassing, stealing, and lying, Fielding does not depict him as immoral in the way that Blifil is immoral because as Tom himself says, "he thought his Honour engaged him to act as he did" (*TJ* 131).

In such circumstances, Tom Jones becomes the "good man who must tread warily in the world to avoid such malicious misinterpretation of his decent actions, and the evil-minded neighbors who are made happy by the misinterpretation" (Paulson 143-144). While the petty-fogger at The Bell Inn becomes the "evil-minded neighbor," to some extent Mrs. Whitefield is as well, though she is more like Tickletext in her naiveté. Though there are certainly other doctrines or motives that could lead to similar misinterpretation, Methodism becomes the most useful exemplar for Fielding because it is equally dangerous when embodied by naïve characters like Mrs. Whitefield, as well as greedy, hypocritical characters like the Blifils. So, while most satirists of Methodism portrayed it in the same way as the Puritans and Quakers had been portrayed earlier, Fielding engages with specific implications and ramifications of particular Methodist doctrines and practices over an extended period of time. For Fielding the problem with Methodism is twofold: it provides a convenient ruse for the truly corrupt, while it also weakens his system of interpreting moral character.

By establishing the underlying discourse between Methodism and Latitudinarianism as two alternative philosophies within the Anglican Church, Fielding is able to tease out the cause

and effect relationship that is oftentimes hidden beneath the use of stereotype. What Fielding understands to be the Methodist dismissal of good works in exchange for the doctrine of faith implicates religion in the interpretation of moral character, and in this way actually provides support for the stereotypes he draws upon in order to make his critique of Methodism. Christian charity, he maintains, requires good works, which are also necessary in order to accurately interpret any given individual's moral character. This view of social ethics coincides with the popular stereotypes of Methodists because their privileging of faith for grace conveniently leaves no reliable method for interpreting character. While Methodism does function to some extent as stereotype in *Tom Jones*, and throughout Fielding's work, this weaving of stereotype into a discussion of Christian charity and moral character makes his use of Methodism more than stereotype, while at the same time managing to justify the stereotype as well.

# Chapter 3
## Methodism and the Complication of Character in *Amelia*

In *Amelia*, Fielding's final novel published in 1751, he reaches the fictionalized equivalent of the conclusion of "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men:" with the interpretation of moral character in the hands of the observer, the chances of most individuals recognizing hypocrites are dismal and the consequences of the resulting misrecognitions are even worse. In "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men" Fielding works through the efficacy of first physiognomy and then behavior as guides by which to assess moral character, and in the novels he follows the same pattern; the parodic *Shamela* focuses primarily on appearances and the comic-epic in prose *Tom Jones* focuses on behavior. Then, in *Amelia*, Fielding's optimistic tone changes as both appearances and behaviors fail him, which results in his first novel in which his hero and heroine find themselves in grave danger at the hands of a hypocrite.

With this alteration in Fielding's approach to the problematic nature of assessing moral character, the function of Methodism in the novel also changes. In the opening chapters of *Amelia* Fielding employs a stereotypical depiction of Methodism as a prison inmate by the name of Cooper picks the pocket of the hero, Booth. Though this is the only specific reference to Methodism and Methodists in the novel, the reference plays an important role in the way we interpret the rest of the work. Within the masquerade, Fielding stages a Methodist meeting led by a lay minister with the reading of Dr. Harrison's sermon-letter that echoes the conventional satiric representation of Methodists abusing scripture. These references to Methodism in turn establish an important connection to the masquerade that exemplifies Fielding's changing understanding of character, setting forth a darker understanding of good and evil in society. In

the end, the masquerade is important both to the conclusion of *Amelia* and to the conclusion of Fielding's career as a novelist for the way it completes a trajectory in which Methodism becomes less important as identity and more important as a representation of a pervasive societal problem: the ease with which false appearances can persuade people in an era of class and geographic mobility. Fielding's use of Methodism in the jail scene and its relationship to the masquerade exposes the reality that there is no satisfactory system of interpretation through which to protect oneself from morally corrupt individuals. While Methodism serves as a scapegoat for Fielding in the earlier novels as he tries to work out his system of interpretation, in *Amelia* he is forced to admit that, in the end, his system does not hold the potential he had at first imagined.

**Judging Methodists in Jail**

In the opening of the jail scene, which encompasses the only direct reference to Methodists and Methodism in the novel, Fielding complicates the guidelines for interpreting moral character that he sets out in "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men." In the "Essay," Fielding initially suggests that appearances provide sufficient evidence of moral character for an observer; however, he concludes that only an "Observer of much Penetration" could recognize the signs embedded in appearances, and therefore, a more reliable guide is necessary (Essay 197). For Fielding, it is the "Actions of Men" that comprise the "more infallible Guide to direct us to the Knowledge of Men" (Essay 197), and specifically, a "Man's good Behavior to those with whom he hath the nearest and closest Connection" (Essay 222).

With the publishing of *Amelia* in 1751, Fielding concludes the fictionalized exploration of his "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men," making its tentative conclusion

decisive by asserting that there can be no certainty in the process of assessing an individual's moral character. In the jail scene no interpretive system is privileged, unlike in *Shamela* or *Tom Jones*. Instead, the hero, Booth, relies on both appearances and behaviors with little consistency, sometimes to his benefit, and often to his detriment. Yet that is exactly the problem Fielding sets out to remedy with his rules in "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men" since "the few Rules which generally prevail on this Head are utterly false, and the very Reverse of Truth" (188). What Fielding reveals through Booth's inconsistency is not that either one of the systems is altogether useless, but instead, that to separate appearances from behaviors and to assume that either can provide on its own an absolute answer to the question of any given individual's morality is a grave mistake. After all, despite Fielding's attempt at confidence in his closing remarks in the "Essay" that behaviors "seem abundantly sufficient" (227), he dedicates the majority of the essay to addressing not only the hazards of judging character by appearances, but also the hazards of judging on the basis of observable behaviors.

As such, the early section of this novel that comprises Booth's entrance into the jail, although spanning only a few pages of text, is itself a dense fictionalization of the problems posed in "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men." Within the scene, Fielding presents a hero whose greatest flaw is not that he sometimes gambles or has had an affair—mistakes similar to Tom Jones' sexual escapades—but instead that he cannot accurately judge moral character, and therefore, is completely at the mercy of "the artful and cunning Part of Mankind" (Essay 181). The jail scene serves Fielding as a microcosm of society, and an experiment in which he can place his decent, but unfortunate hero in order to exemplify the dangers of not having an effective method through which "to get any Insight into the Characters

of those with whom we converse, and by which we may frustrate all the Cunning and Designs of Hypocrisy" (Essay 226). While Fielding makes no guarantee that if Booth were only more consistent in the method by which he judges individuals he would escape the dangers presented by Robinson and Cooper, he does seem to imply that Booth's chances against them would be better. Indeed, the chapter leaves Booth coming to this conclusion himself as he begins to "waver in his opinion, whether the character given by Mr. Robinson of himself, or that which the others gave of him, was the truer" (*Am.* 32). Yet, Booth comes to this conclusion only after Robinson has won every shilling from him in a game of cards. Nonetheless, the realization supports Fielding's ultimate conclusion in the "Essay" that the best judge of character are actions, specifically those observed firsthand. Later, this helps to explain Fielding's marked retreat from that conclusion and the "Essay" as a whole after the masquerade scene and Booth's conversion at the end of the novel because the damage to innocent individuals such as Amelia is done by those same actions that expose hypocrisy to the observer.

At the opening of the novel, the hero, Booth, has been imprisoned because he has been involved in a street fight, though he claims that he was only intervening to bring it to an end (*Am.* 144). Once in the prison, our honorable hero is paraded through a collection of deceptive, morally corrupt individuals by an inmate named Robinson in much the same way that Dante is led through Hell by Virgil. Furthermore, just like in Dante's scenes of Hell, the emphasis on Booth's journey is on the visual representation of immoral actions. Both the narrator's descriptions and Robinson's introductions are focused on physical appearances, and in the style of Hogarth, those physical appearances reflect the moral characters of the inmates quite accurately: for instance, "the very first person who accosted him was called Blear-Eyed Moll; a

woman of no comely appearance" (*Am.* 21). In the course of a lengthy paragraph, we learn in graphic detail that Moll has one eye and that that eye "consisted almost entirely of white, or rather yellow, with a little grey spot in the corner, so small that it was scarce discernible," that she has no nose, her teeth are black, and she has a scar from "ear to ear" (*Am.* 21). Of course, all of these physical markings result from Moll's life as a prostitute, the most obvious of which is the deterioration of her nose, indicating syphilis.

In the case of Moll, as in the case of many of the other inmates, physical appearances do accurately communicate moral character—a fact Fielding admits "may seem a Contradiction" to his consequent supposition that appearances are the least reliable guides to character (Essay 196). Yet, when Booth meets Robinson, he disregards the possibility that, in the context of the jail, appearances might be fairly reliable markers of character. Robinson, with a worn countenance, "red beard of above a fortnight's growth" and a worn-through coat, is not "of the most inviting aspect" (*Am.* 22). However, Booth discounts those cues because of Robinson's actions toward him—delivering him from his grotesque confrontation with Blear-Eyed Moll—and because "there was something in [his] manner" that "seemed to distinguish him from the crowd of wretches" (*Am.* 23). So, despite Booth's correct assessment of Moll's character based on her appearance, he disregards the power of appearances to communicate character in the case of Robinson and defers to behavior in accordance with Fielding's conclusion in "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men," in which he asserts that appearances do communicate character, but not as reliably as behavior (226-227). Even so, the alarming fact is not that Booth is inconsistent, but that he changes his method of interpreting character for no apparent reason,

especially considering the fact that Robinson is a criminal, in which case his behavior should clearly be questioned.

It is at this point—after Booth has met both Robinson and Blear-Eyed Moll—that Cooper, the Methodist, approaches Booth. However, in the immediate description of the encounter between Booth and the Methodist, the only information with which we (and Booth) may judge Cooper is by his physical appearance and by his words, which Fielding tells us in the "Essay" is sufficient if the correct rules are followed and the right system utilized. While the narrator's description of "poor Booth" in the earlier scene insinuates that Booth is resistant to Blear-Eyed Moll's conversation, Booth allows the Methodist to accompany him, apparently because he is "grave looking" and "rather better drest than the majority of the company" (*Am.* 27). Yet, the contrast between Cooper's "grave" look, suggestive of religious piety, and his pickpocketing exemplifies the stereotypical assumption that Methodists were hypocrites because of the doctrinal privileging of faith over good works or acts of charity. In this case, Booth's assumption that a better dressed individual with a "grave" look is less morally corrupt than an individual in tatters with a face deformed by syphilis does not hold true.

In a satiric representation of the Methodist proselytizing, Cooper immediately targets Booth as a likely convert upon meeting him and offers his optimistic condolences to Booth that crimes are only "human errors" and that he should "rejoice" in that (*Am.* 27). Cooper is initially drawn to Booth because he is "in such intimacy with that rascal [Robinson], who makes no scruple of disowning all revealed religion" (*Am.* 27). Yet, part of the reason that Booth trusts Robinson is that, like him, he does not consider himself to be a religious man—Booth, though he "was in his heart a well-wisher to religion," had "very slight and uncertain" notions regarding it

(*Am.* 23). This uncertainty about religion and deviation from orthodoxy and his vulnerable position in the jail situates Booth as a prime target for Methodist conversion. We recognize Booth as a good person who is merely uncertain about religion, but Cooper recognizes him as a fellow criminal who would find a doctrine like Methodism appealing because it can be so easily manipulated. Therefore, when Cooper confronts Booth, he is fulfilling the first step of patterned conversion: bringing the individual to an awareness of the nature of their sinfulness (Lyles 105).

With Cooper's attempt at conversion—or at least conversation—with Booth, we see Fielding satirize Methodism as he does in *Shamela* in the way that Cooper deftly manipulates the tenets of Methodism to suit his own immediate (and temporal) needs. In *Shamela* Parson Williams seeks to privilege the Spirit over the Flesh by distinguishing Mr. Booby as the "Object of [Shamela's] Necessity" and himself as the "Object of [her] Love," thereby justifying adultery so long as it is for love (by which Williams means lust), which he identifies with the Spiritual realm (*Sh.* 271). Similarly, Cooper tries to differentiate between the spiritual realm and the temporal realm in order to justify his own behavior when he claims that crimes are only "human errors," which are forgiven by God's grace. According to Cooper's understanding of the doctrine of grace, its basis in God's sacrifice of his Son for the sins of all means that those sins that he calls "human errors" are of no consequence to an individual's salvation, so long as he or she has faith in God (*Free Grace* 5). In much the same vein, when Cooper suggests that "the worse a man is by nature, the more room there is for grace" (*Am.* 27), he twists John Wesley's explanation of assurance in *Free Grace*. In that sermon, Wesley affirms that since "God is the Author and Doer" of "Whatsoever Good is in Man," his grace is "Free in all" (*Free Grace* 6), which Cooper assumes makes God responsible for his actions, and not himself. Furthermore,

Wesley clarifies that although grace may be available for all, grace once given can be lost. Of assurance, a faithful individual's awareness of having received God's grace, Wesley says, it is not "Assurance of what is Future; but only of what *now* is" (*Free Grace* 15). Cooper, however, suggests that any fault can be overlooked, including faults yet to be committed—such as his theft of Booth's snuffbox.

Cooper uses Methodist doctrine for his own personal gain in two different ways: first, he interprets the doctrine so that he may claim (and believe) that he has received the grace of God without changing his lifestyle, and second, he uses the opportunity to convert Booth as a cover for picking his pocket. In "The Character of a Methodist," Wesley denounces such opportunism in his assertion that a Methodist is not hindered from "*running the Race which is set before him*"[4] by the "Customs of the World" and, therefore, "knows, that Vice does not loose its Nature" (13-14). Even more damning to Cooper, Wesley continues on this point that man "cannot *fare sumptuously every Day*, or *make Provision for the Flesh, to fulfill the Lusts thereof*…*lay up Treasures upon the Earth*…or *adorn himself*…*with Gold or costly Apparel*" (Character 14). Cooper, of course, is guilty of several if not all of these vices, and so when in the final sentence he "declares" himself to be a Methodist, we already recognize that fact, as would the average reader in Fielding's day. While satires of Methodism—Fielding's included—do not acknowledge Wesley's own condemnations, the same vices Wesley denounces here are those that enable the satiric critique by creating a contrast between Christian doctrine and practice. As such, the complexity of the doctrine of *Free Grace* and the ease with which it can be

[4] In this passage, Wesley cites Hebrews 12:1-2, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith."

misconstrued and misrepresented by self-interested individuals like Cooper makes Methodism the perfect exemplar of the effects of hypocrisy on unwitting members of society.

When we learn on the following page that the "Methodist had forsaken [Booth]" and had stolen his snuffbox, the Methodist becomes Judas and our hero becomes a Christ-figure (*Am.* 28), which fits the Methodist/anti-Methodist binary that satires of Methodism inherently construct. Fielding then turns the language of religion against Cooper, clearly asserting his (the narrator's) powerful skills of interpreting moral character over the unfortunate Booth, just as "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men" would lead us to expect, while simultaneously asserting a correct and orthodox use of scripture. The omniscient narrator goes on to tell us that "the Methodist had so dexterously conveyed out of his pocket [the box], as we mentioned in the last chapter" (*Am.* 30). This omniscience that is exemplified so well in this instance serves to solidify the connections between Fielding's "Essay" and his novels, specifically *Amelia*, because in the "Essay," he takes on the same omniscient quality in his regular reminders that the efficacy of the systems he sets forth is dependent on the skill of the observer. Yet, while in the "Essay" omniscience is used to set forth a didactic system of interpreting moral character, in *Amelia* it consistently suggests that such systems are doomed to failure. Just as in the case of Booth's religious uncertainty, Fielding seems to be suggesting through the intrusion of the omniscient narrator that if a system of interpretation is dependent on the skill of the observer, then a more powerful, perhaps divine and omniscient, authority is needed to protect the morally good from the morally corrupt.

In the revelation of Cooper as pickpocket, Fielding, as the narrator, expresses the theft of Booth's snuffbox through Cooper's own Methodist vocabulary saying that he had "searched

[Booth] to the bottom" (*Am.* 28). In another satiric use of Methodism, the narrator himself tickles metaphorical Methodist diction in order to express Cooper's real actions: literally searching the bottoms of Booth's pockets for possessions worth stealing. In manipulating the language of the Methodists just as he perceived the Methodists to do with scripture, the narrator's (and Fielding's) use of the phrase "search to the bottom" corrects its Methodist usage and gives it meaning once more. While to "search to the bottom" meant to "examine thoroughly whether [one] be in the Faith; whether *Christ Jesus* be in [one] or no" (Treatise 92), Fielding removes the meaning of the phrase from the spiritual realm, placing it the temporal instead, thereby creating the contrast between doctrine and practice of which Wesley himself is critical in "The Character of a Methodist" (345).

Cooper, of course, presents the box at the close of the scene under the pretense that he had merely found it and was waiting for a chance to return it to its rightful owner. Booth, however, has not the skill of observation and interpretation and remains oblivious to Cooper's hypocrisy, thereby immediately suspecting Robinson of the theft instead. Yet, Robinson appeals to his clothing as a sign of his innocence in the matter, which Booth readily accepts as proof to the contrary. Once again, Booth assumes that appearance and behavior are causally related; he assumes that nice clothing indicates affluence and that affluence is indicative of honest ingenuity and hard work. However, as Fielding states in the "Essay" one symptom of hypocrisy is ostentation, which appears in "external Forms" such as garments, as well as in an individual's countenance and speech (Essay 215). What Booth fails to realize then is that hypocrites modify their outward appearance to cover their "natural masques"[5] which Fielding maintains that a

[5]In the dedication to his 1728 poem "The Masquerade," Fielding introduces the term "natural masque" to describe the "horrid Phyz" of the famous masquerade host Count Heidegger. In her 1995 study of gender

skillful observer may interpret (Essay 185). From the perspective of the reader and narrator, however, Booth's judgment at this moment discloses the severity of the situation: with Booth's trust restored, Robinson suggests that he offer a reward for the return of the box (*Am.* 31). The implication is that Robinson has plotted with Cooper against Booth and that both will share their profits—the crown Booth has offered as a reward (*Am.* 31).

With the charge of theft levied on Cooper through Robinson's deft handling, Cooper continues his own manipulations and maintains his innocence claiming that he never intended to steal because the "Spirit would not suffer him" to do so (*Am.* 31), again misconstruing the doctrine of *Free Grace* by not taking into account the restriction of assurance to the present moment (*Free Grace* 15). What Cooper gains, however, from such a claim and manipulation of Wesley's doctrine is that it absolves him of any accountability for his actions, just like his initial claims about crimes being only "human errors" that are easily forgiven. Robinson remembers this too, and quickly reminds Cooper of his claim that wickedness better allows for God's grace, which Cooper contests has been misunderstood. While the reader might be expecting a clarification of Methodist doctrine here, Cooper only distorts the doctrine of *Free Grace* even further saying, "'no man can be wicked after he is possessed by the Spirit'" (*Am.* 31); but once again, we know that grace and assurance apply only to the present moment (*Free Grace* 15). In this way, Fielding effectively frames Cooper as the perfect example of the convenience Methodist doctrine provided with its emphasis on faith, which cannot be socially and objectively

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and identity in Fielding's plays and novels, *Natural Masques*, Jill Campbell explains that Fielding's phrase expresses the way in which "that the apparently most personal and essential aspects of identity may be revealed as artificial and contingent constructs" (13).

verified like good works, to individuals wanting the benefits of religious affiliation without abandoning their inequities.

At the conclusion of the novel—and perhaps for the novel to conclude—Booth does embrace religion and is converted (*Am.* 522), though not to Methodism as Cooper might have hoped. Instead, Booth's conversion, influenced by his own shame and the sermons of Fielding's favorite Latitudinarian minister, Dr. Isaac Barrow, is thoroughly Anglican. Compounded with these influences is the fact that Booth is once again in jail when he converts (*Am.* 522), which attempts to restore order to the novel. Yet, that optimistic resolution is predicated on the assumption that Booth has learned from his experience and can be the "accurate Observer" Fielding's "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men" requires (Essay 185). Likewise, the masquerade, which we find in many ways remains as ambiguous about the nature of character and identity as the jail scene, makes Booth's conversion difficult to accept as Terry Castle suggests in *Masquerade and Civilization* (243), which is why the resolution of *Amelia* is much more tenuous than the resolution of its predecessor, *Tom Jones*. Consequently, Booth's orthodox conversion again seems to indicate that Fielding has given up on the idea of a system of interpretation that can guide people away from the dangers posed by hypocrites and other morally corrupt individuals. Booth never becomes the "accurate Observer" of the "Essay" nor does he ever successfully abide by a system of interpretation meant to remedy that limitation. Instead, Booth converts. By converting as he does, Booth places the responsibility for his protection from moral corruption in the hands of a divine power via the Anglican tradition.

**Masquerade, Methodism, and the Interpretation of Moral Character**

Later, in the masquerade scene, *Amelia* forces us to think not only about the system of interpretation Fielding constructs and criticizes in "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men," but also about the need for such a system. Even in the "Essay" Fielding poses the importance of his project by drawing connections between hypocrisy and the masquerade. The fact that Fielding begins "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men" with images of the masquerade shows us that it is, in fact, his guiding metaphor in his considerations of character. Deceit, concealment, and self-interest all suggest to Fielding the duplicity inherent to the masquerade, and therefore, he ends the prefatory section of his essay with this observation:

> Thus while the crafty and designing Part of Mankind, consulting only their own separate Advantage, endeavour to maintain one constant Imposition on others, the whole World becomes a vast Masquerade, where the greatest Part appear dignified under false Vizors and Habits; a very few only shewing their own Faces, who become, by so doing, the Astonishment and Ridicule of all the rest." (Essay 184)

The use of the masquerade in the "Essay" also importantly builds upon the depiction of the masquerade in Fielding's first publication, a poem aptly entitled "The Masquerade," which relates the story of the poet's visit to one of Count Heidegger's famous masquerades at the Haymarket. In what Jill Campbell terms in *Natural Masques* "the arena of self-consciously and admittedly assumed identities," the "division between assumed and natural or real features of identity" are repeatedly challenged in the work (12-13). For example, the poet finds himself

asking, “how from another woman/Do you a strumpet masqu’d distinguish?” (Masquerade 156-157). So accustomed is the poet to judge moral character on the basis of appearance that he is defeated by the masquerade in which physical appearance is purposely disguised. The woman to whom the poet poses his question answers that “virtue’s unconfin’d and free…A perfect shadow, light as air,/It rambles loosely every where” (Masquerade 164-169). Virtue being essentially synonymous with character in this instance, the efficacy of judging character on the basis of appearance is laughed away with the woman’s laughter at the poet’s confusion. In turn, character becomes subject to the will of the individual, just like the physical disguises worn to the masquerade assembly. The result of character functioning in this way is that the interpretation of moral character becomes almost impossible, just as Fielding suggests in the “Essay” in which he begins with the problem represented in “The Masquerade” and attempts to solve by devising more accurate systems and rules to govern the process of interpretation.

In the “Essay” Fielding restrains himself from declaring without question that “Man is a deceitful Animal,” but rather turns to the way that society teaches its members how “rather to conceal Vices, than to cultivate Virtues” (Essay 183). For Fielding then, hypocrisy is motivated by self-interest and the drive for “private Distinction” (Essay 183). Therefore, so long as the most expedient way to gain notoriety in society is “to maintain one constant Imposition on others” and “to sacrifice the Interest of all others,” (Essay 184), society becomes a perpetual gathering of hypocrites in which those individuals who do not don visors and disguises pay the price for their own morality. The difference between the duplicity of a masquerade and the duplicity of hypocrisy is for Fielding only the masquerade’s visual representation as we see in

the "Essay," it is hypocrisy's lack of a similar visual component that is the fundamental problem with the interpretation of moral character.

In *Amelia* the masquerade scene illustrates a breakdown in the confidence Fielding exudes in "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men." Whereas in the "Essay" he assumes that it is society that breeds moral corruption, the move from satirizing Methodism to the masquerade scene in *Amelia* suggests that Fielding has begun to believe that corruption exists naturally, and that the default morality of humans is evil as opposed to goodness. As such, the masquerade revises the notion of interpreting moral character that has been illustrated through other means, such as the opening jail scene. The masquerade removes the emphasis from society's role in creating corrupt individuals, and with society partially exonerated in this way, the rules outlined in the "Essay" become irrelevant because they work only if the situation can be amended by human means. However, as Booth's lack of religious affiliation that results in his conversion to Anglicanism implies, only a divine power can protect good individuals from the dangers posed by the morally corrupt by intervening in their behalf.

Accordingly, the masquerade scene in *Amelia* functions as a symbolic form that communicates Fielding's revised stance on human morality. In *Masquerade and Civilization*, Terry Castle describes the masquerade assembly as "at once a highly visible public institution and a highly charged image—a social phenomenon of expansive proportions and a cultural sign of considerable potency" (2). Castle goes on to explain that, for these reasons, "the masquerade broached in a peculiarly stylized way certain issues we have come to locate at the heart of eighteenth-century culture" and was "in the deepest sense a kind of collective meditation on self and other, and an exploration of their mysterious dialectic" (Castle 4). In essence then, the

masquerade scene is only a stylized representation of the same themes and points Fielding explores first in "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men" and then the earliest scenes of the *Amelia*. While chaos and disorder characterize Booth's inconsistent and illogical approach to the interpretation of character in the jail scene, the masquerade, due to its cultural potency, emerges as "exemplary disorder" (Castle 6).

As such an "exemplary" representation of the novel's themes, the masquerade also illustrates a melding of the different ways in which Fielding has exposed and explored the interpretation of moral character that he formally approaches in "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men." One of those alternate ways Fielding approaches the issue of character is, of course, his satiric treatment of Methodism, which informs the masquerade scene through the reading of Dr. Harrison's sermon-letter on the morality of adultery by a group of young men. Many factors, including the subject matter of the letter, the demographics of the crowd that gathers to hear the reading, and the description of the event itself are all reminiscent of the controversial Methodist meeting led by lay preachers. These images of the informal Methodist meeting and the masquerade both illustrate a reversal of social norms, which is essentially the same connection Terry Castle makes when she describes both satire and the masquerade as creating an "anti-nature, a world upside-down, an intoxicating reversal of ordinary sexual, social, and metaphysical hierarchies" (6).

In *Amelia*, the final masquerade scene is the culmination of a story that has steadily surrounded its hero and heroine with increasing numbers of hypocritical and self-interested individuals. Particularly relevant to the masquerade scene are those individuals associated with Amelia's domestic circle. Living in rented rooms, Amelia becomes friends with her landlady,

Mrs. Ellison; however, it is Mrs. Ellison who ultimately prostitutes Amelia to a mysterious figure known only as the Noble Peer. It is at the masquerade, to which Amelia has been given a ticket, that Mrs. Ellison plans to provide the Noble Peer with an opportunity to take advantage of Amelia. Amelia, however, is warned of the danger by a friend, Mrs. Bennet, whom she has met, fittingly, through Mrs. Ellison. Mrs. Bennet, known late in the novel as Mrs. Atkinson after she marries a fellow solider friend of Booth's, also rented rooms from Mrs. Ellison and was lured into the company of the Noble Peer. It is through her story that Amelia is saved from Mrs. Ellison and the Noble Peer's sinister plan when Mrs. Bennet takes Amelia's place at the masquerade. In turn, the risks the masquerade poses to Amelia are averted because she and Mrs. Bennet use the machinery of the masquerade—disguise—for their own benefit. As Castle argues in her chapter on *Amelia* in *Masquerade and Civilization*, the novel's masquerade scene is "equivocal" and at times ambiguous in its representation of duplicity and hypocrisy (185); for Fielding the masquerade holds the possibility to be at once deceptive and liberating (Castle 183), as we see in the assurance that the heroine is in no immediate danger. Due to this potential for both deception and liberation, the masquerade becomes a universal symbol and representation of the dangers brought on by the inability to accurately interpret moral character.

Again, it is the image of an informal Methodist meeting that is absorbed by the machinery of the masquerade. With the doctrines of *Free Grace* and assurance that emphasized the role of the individual in his or her own spiritual status, the practice of preaching by the unordained came to mark Methodism. As Lyles recounts in *Methodism Mocked*, John Wesley famously rejected the practice at first, but was brought to support it by his mother's warnings that a call of God cannot be contradicted (62-63). Upon Wesley's endorsement, satires of

Methodism began to exploit the difference between lay preachers and the "well-trained and largely even well-born clergy" of the Anglican Church (Lyles 62) by depicting all lay ministers as "blockheads, knaves, and dunces" (Lyles 64).

The image of the Methodist lay preacher holding an informal meeting emerges when a letter concerning adultery that Dr. Harrison, a clergyman who acts as a mentor and friend to Booth and Amelia throughout the novel, has written to Booth's friend Colonel James (who has ill intentions toward Amelia) is found by a "large assembly of young fellows," and is read aloud (*Am.* 417). As Terry Castle explains, "Individual behavior was freer at the masquerade than at virtually any other public occasion where the classes and sexes mixed openly" (34), and the event did "'promiscuously' mingle the classes" and "bring together men and women from all social ranks" (28). Here, the masquerade not only provides men and women the chance to interact unattended (which is what gives the Noble Peer an opportunity to rape Amelia), but also it provides a chance for individuals of different classes to mingle. Additionally, the narrator refers to the young men as "bucks," and tells us that such an event (as the reading) is "sure of attracting a croud in the assemblies of the polite, as in those of their inferiors" (*Am.* 417). This admission that the masquerade is not altogether "polite" changes the dynamics of the reading of the letter-sermon by suggesting that it is primarily the "inferiors" who are attracted by such styles of oration even though the elite masqueraders prove inquisitive. Indeed, the Methodist movement did appeal to many working-class "inferiors." However, that is not to say that Methodism only appealed to the working classes. As Tobias Smollett's novel *Humphry Clinker* so aptly illustrates, Methodism drew a diverse audience ranging from servants to their gentry or aristocrat employers. In any case though, the image of the working class lay leader preaching an

impromptu sermon would be easily recognizable for the contemporary reader of a novel such as *Amelia* because just as working class individuals lacked the authority of the aristocracy, so too did Methodism lack the authority and status of the Anglican Church.

Perhaps the best point of comparison to Fielding's image of an informal Methodist meeting is another scene from literature: two scenes in Tobias Smollett's 1771 novel, *Humphry Clinker*. Although written twenty years after Fielding's *Amelia*, Smollett's novel, which much more directly confronts the troubled relationship between Methodism and eighteenth-century English society, depicts exactly what Fielding alludes to in the masquerade scene. In the first of *Humphry Clinker*'s two images of the title character leading a Methodist worship service, the servant (Humphry) is found by his master, Matthew Bramble, "exalted upon a stool" preaching to a group of "lacqueys and chairmen" (Smollett 131). Later, after another preaching episode, Humphry explains to Bramble that he was "encouraged to mount the rostrum, by the example and success of a weaver," which highlights the way in which Methodism came to be associated with the working classes (Smollett 172). In both these scenes from *Humphry Clinker* and in the reading of the sermon-letter in *Amelia*, what is emphasized is the way in which any place can be the site of discourse on morality and that society is not homogenous. In *Amelia*, Fielding's use of Methodism is integrated into society at large as just one of many examples of moral corruption being disguised. Anyone can be the agent of that assimilation and integration, whether a footman or a group of "young bucks" and other "inferiors." Similarly, in both images of the Methodist meeting, a sermon on morality is integrated into society beyond the church, whether that be in the street or during a masquerade. As such, though modeled after Fielding's favorite Latitudinarian ministers, Dr. Harrison, through his letter, allows for issues of morality

and character to be taken up outside the church where Methodism's existence demands that they be considered.

In addition, when the orator begins to speak, "mounted on a bench," as if he were going to give a sermon, rather than read a letter, just as Humphry does in Smollett's novel (*Am.* 418), Fielding also makes a satiric reference to the popularly acknowledged theatricality of Methodist sermons by both ordained and unordained ministers. Coupled with charges of enthusiasm (false inspiration), Methodist sermons appeared to eighteenth-century audiences as "dramatic performance[s] with the drama heightened by highly emotional language and direct appeals to the audience" (Lyles 73). Methodist preachers were also characterized by their style of sermonizing, which was often in part extemporaneous, and is often described being accompanied by "flamboyant gestures" and an "emotional-filled voice" that left them open to the accusation that their appeal "was not the reason or the judgement but to the emotions" (Lyles 73). Gestures, voices, and the move way from delivering sermons by strictly reading them from the page made the Methodist meeting more like a theatrical performance than a traditional Anglican service because such aspects as gesture, voice, and delivery were skills valued in the theater, not in the church. The similarities between the delivery style of Methodist sermons and performance is reflected in the masquerade in *Amelia*—already a symbol of performance—through the choices the self-appointed public orator makes in his presentation of the letter. After reading the first portion, the young man inserts his own descriptive interlude: "'*Thus, gentlemen and ladies, you see the scene is closed. So here ends the first act—and thus begins the second*'" (*Am.* 419). Since the portion of the letter preceding this statement introduces and defines adultery, the orator has taken his cue from the material's moral content and constructed a Methodist sermon from it.

Again, this is evidence of the increasing integration of Methodism into other representations of duplicity and hypocrisy that complicate the process of assessing moral character over the course of Fielding's career as a novelist. Interestingly though, such a reading is also supported by the fact that John Wesley and George Whitefield began preaching in theaters as the Anglican Church began to restrict them from preaching in churches—a practice, like field preaching, that was in defiance of the Conventicle Act (Lyles 75).

Finally, within the reading of the sermon-letter, adultery is described as "robbing [a man] of his property" (*Am*. 418). In the jail scene Fielding sets up the connection between Methodism and robbery when Cooper picks Booth's pocket. Here, the Noble Peer essentially plans to rob Booth of Amelia, providing what seems be an intentional parallel. As Castle argues, "When Fielding writes that the hypocrite hides his true nature just as the masquerader hides his true form, the underlying epistemological appeal is the same: that there is indeed a truth beneath the disguise, a zone of absolute integrity at once immutable, morally unmysterious, and ultimately visible" (194). Cooper's use of his religious affiliation to distract Booth from his true intentions is in this sense no different from the Noble Peer's use of a domino mask to affect the rape of Amelia, thus stealing her virtue from her and stealing from Booth his wife; both reveal a unsavory truth about human nature and character that lurks beneath the surface.

Consequently, *Amelia* exemplifies the way in which Fielding's satiric treatment of Methodism, like his use of the masquerade, not only illustrates the pervasiveness of hypocrisy in an emerging modern society, but also more specifically comments on the individual's ability to recognize that hypocrisy and extends the project of "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men." Only in *Amelia*, however, is this similarity pronounced. Though *Amelia*

does not provide the convincingly restorative conclusion that *Shamela, Joseph Andrews*, and *Tom Jones* do, its ambiguity is what ultimately illuminates the significant role of Methodist satire in Fielding's novels. In each of the early novels, the satiric treatment of Methodism poses a specific problem to the methods of interpreting moral character that are set forth in the "Essay" to which Fielding is able to offer a definitive answer. In *Amelia*, however, neither the jail scene nor the masquerade offers a conclusive directive as to how to accurately interpret moral character and distinguish hypocrites in society.

The result is that Methodism emerges as a part of Fielding's larger project that aims to provide naïve, innocent individuals with a way to identify and protect themselves from hypocrites when it is absorbed by the symbolic machinery of the masquerade. In the previous novels, the satire of Methodism stands alone in isolated scenes, though it functions as just one of many tools Fielding uses to explore the problem of assessing moral character. However, in *Amelia* the satire is integrated in purpose, and then finally in form as well. As the last of Fielding's novels, *Amelia* fulfills the trajectory of Fielding's project on interpreting moral character by integrating Methodism into his conclusion about the ability of the average individual to recognize and expose hypocrisy. With Methodism equal in force to masquerade in this final novel, his satires of Methodism appear to be less directed at the religious group itself, and more a part of the greater purpose of providing innocent members of society with an accurate, consistent method by which to recognize morally corrupt individuals who would otherwise take advantage of them. With Methodism designated as a possible site of corrupt human character in an increasingly duplicitous world, we can see how Methodism in Fielding's novels is a means through which corrupt characters can be revealed. Thus, Fielding, though

certainly a staunch anti-Methodist, in his satiric treatment of the doctrine and practice is in the end exactly who he aspires to be in “An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men:” a “Champion of the innocent and undesigning” (181); in his last final novel, however, the world has turned out to be more threatening and treacherous than he had first imagined.

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# Vita

Caitlin Lee Kelly, a native of Rogers, Arkansas, graduated Summa Cum Laude from the University of Central Arkansas in Conway, Arkansas in May 2006 with a Bachelor of Arts in English and a minor in Music. At UCA she was also a member of the Honors College where she earned an additional minor in Honors Interdisciplinary Studies. In August of 2008 Ms. Kelly received a Master of Arts in English from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Following the completion of her Master of Arts, Ms. Kelly is pursuing her doctorate in English at the University of Missouri, Columbia where her research focus is the eighteenth-century British novel. In addition, at MU she was the recipient of the English Department's Mary-Joe Purcell Fellowship, which is awarded to an incoming PhD student working in seventeenth- or eighteenth-century studies.